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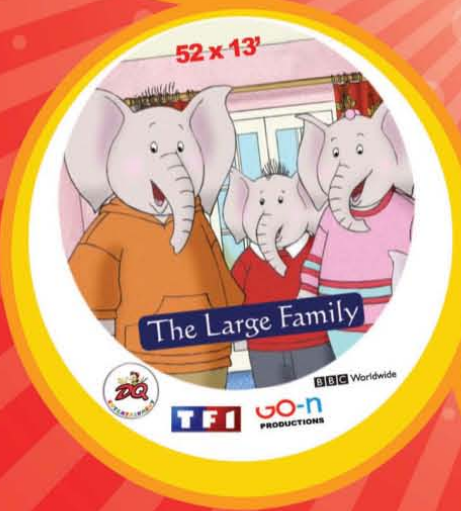
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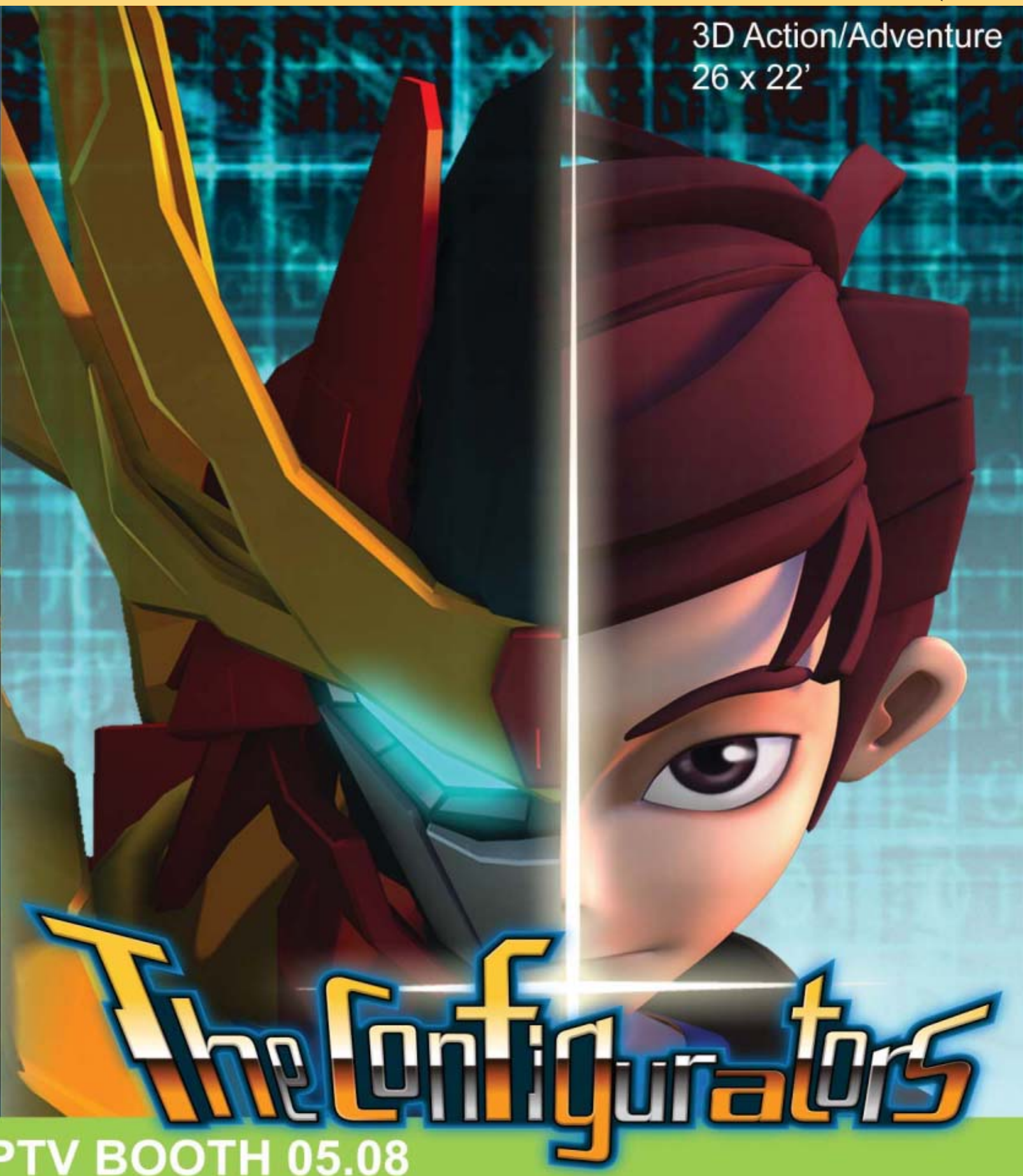
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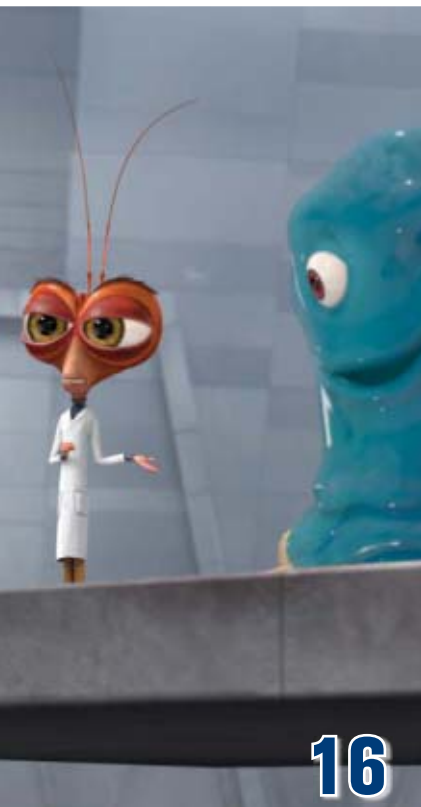


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MIPTV Cover: Gaumont Alphanim's new animated series *Matt's Monsters* makes a splash at MIPTV.



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to find out more about this month's cool DVD giveaway, *The Tale of Despereaux*, courtesy of Universal Home Entertainment.





Something funny is going on in Europe. While all the media wizards and trend-watchers have been talking about the shift from long-form entertainment to shorter-format content, there suddenly seems to be a boom in auteur-driven, artistically valid animated features in the continent. We're not talking about a bunch of crude, CG-animated animals bouncing around the forest cracking wise and fighting evil here.

Animation Magazine's president Jean Thoren just got back from the awesome Cartoon Movie event, held for the first time in Lyon, France, and she couldn't stop raving about some of the well-crafted projects she saw there. Thanks to the solid work of general director Marc Vandeweyer, manager Annick Maes and the rest of the team at Cartoon Movie, more co-productions between European countries have been greenlit in the past decade. This year alone a total of 51 projects were on the table with a total budget of 370 million euros (that's seven completed movies, 10 in production, 16 in development and 18 in concept stages). Also, in the past 10 years, 99 of these features have already been released theatrically in Europe and 24 more are in production.

One of these completed features is Cartoon Saloon/Les Armateurs/Vivi Film's wonderful movie *The Secret of Kells*, which was released in Ireland in March. We have written about this exquisitely animated feature in the magazine before (in fact, the movie's talented director Tomm Moore was one of our Rising Stars of Animation picks in 2008). Now the global reviews are in, and everyone seems to fall for its visual panache inspired in part by pre-medieval illuminated manuscripts and its elegant script, which targets a young demographic. As the *Variety* review pointed out, "Their approach produces a pleasingly ye-olde-world-y look that plays off the simplified, UPA-studio-meets-the-Dark-Ages characters with intricate, Celtic design-inspired detailing, especially when the book literally comes to life."

It's not surprising that *The Secret of Kells* will have a special screening at Pixar next week. John Lasseter and the studio that has been in the forefront of CG animation for the past



two decades have always been fans of artistic movies with special points of view—whether they're 2D, CG or a clever mix of the two. Let's hope audiences all over the U.S. get to experience this and other gems from across the Atlantic more often.

Don't forget to check out the next issue of *Animation Magazine*, in which we'll provide a comprehensive look at all the movies planned for the next three years all over the world—just in time for the big Cannes film festival. It will be a lot of work, but it's not really work when you're covering things you love!

Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor-in-Chief
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Meet Tom McLean, Animag's New Website Editor

We are thrilled to announce that the amazing **Thomas J. McLean** has joined our team as website editor. Tom has written numerous features about the animation, vfx and comic-book world over the years, and he is now offering his expertise and insights on a daily basis on www.animationmagazine.net.

In addition to this publication, his work has appeared in *Variety*, *Below the Line*, *Emmy Magazine*, *Metromix* and the *Los Angeles Times*. He also writes the influential blog *Bags and Boards*, which can be found at <http://bagsandboards.blogspot.com>, and his first book, *Mutant Cinema: The X-Men Trilogy from Comics to Screen*, will be in stores this spring. You can reach him at tom@animationmagazine.net if you have any hot tips, ideas and comments or just want to say hi!



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April

1-3 The small-screen content mart **MIPTV** continues this week in Cannes (www.miptv.com).



1-5 Scale the heights of the animated and live-action shorts world at the annual **Aspen Shortfest** (www.aspenfilm.org).



3 Director Justin Lin teams up with actors Vin Diesel and Paul Walker for a reboot of **Fast & Furious**.



7 Although **The Tale of Despereaux** didn't get love from the Oscars last December, many praised its Dutch art-inspired visuals. You can check it out today on DVD and Blu-ray. Also new in stores: **Ben 10 Alien Force Vol. 3**, **Max Fleischer's Superman: 1941-1942** and three volumes of the new **Disney Animation Collections**.



10 **Final Destination** director James Wong had the thankless job of delivering a live-action version of the popular anime series, **Dragon Ball**. You can see the result, **Dragonball: Evolution** in theaters today.



10-12 The Hawaii Convention Center in Honolulu is the site for the annual **Kawaii Kon**, which takes place this weekend (www.kawaii-kon.org).



11 **Visual Music Marathon**, a 12-hour program of works by digital artists and composers from around the world, debuts at New York's Northeastern University (www.2009vmm.neu.edu).



17 Get ready for **Crank: High Voltage**, in which Jason Statham is back as the hyper-active action machine loved by the masses.



17-19 Wrap your minds around the new Vegas sci-fi and fantasy confab which is appropriately called **Xanadu**. Gothic artist Brom and vfx master Joe Viskocil are among the guests of honor (www.xanadulasvegas.com).



18-23 Get an insider's view of all the hot new tech tools and software at the **NAB SHOW** event in Las Vegas.



Pixar's stereoscopy, The Henson Company, 3-D technologies and Animal Planet are three of the Content Theater's "case studies" this year (www.nabshow.com).



21 If you missed the popular **Seth MacFarlane's Calvacade of Cartoon Comedy** online, you can check them out in one classy DVD collection today! Also up for grabs today is **Tiny Toons Adventures Season 1, Vol. 2**; **Freakazoid: The Complete Second Season** and **Squidbillies, Vol. 2**.

21-23 Learn all about the latest development in the online world of animation and content creation at the **Cartoon Digital** forum held in Murcia, Spain (www.cartoon-media.eu).

22 Narrated by Patrick Stewart, Disney's beautifully shot **Earth** documentary chronicles the life and challenges of four animal clans on the big screen.



22-25 Baton Rouge, LA, is even more festive this week as the city hosts the annual **Red Stick Int'l Animation Fest** (www.redstickfestival.org).



25 Get a new perspective on Asia at the **China Int'l Cartoon & Animation Festival**, taking place in Hangzhou thru May 3 (www.cicaf.com/english).



28 Meet George Jetson, his boy Elroy, daughter Judy and Jane his wife in the new DVD release, **The Jetsons: The Movie**. Also out today is **The Looney, Looney, Looney Bugs Bunny Movie** and **X-Men, Marvel Comic-Book Collection** Vols. 1 and 2 on DVD.

29 You can get a sneak peek at lots of cool science fiction movies and TV projects at the fab **Sci-Fi London** festival, running until May 3 (www.sci-fi-london.com).



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail mercedes@animationmagazine.net.

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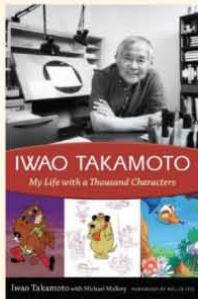


Iwao Takamoto: My Life with a Thousand Characters

By Iwao Takamoto and Michael Mallory

(University Press of Mississippi, cloth: \$50; paperback: \$22)

Those who are familiar with the creative history of Hanna-Barbera know that the late Iwao Takamoto (1925-2007) was the man behind the designs of such iconic characters as Scooby-Doo, Atom Ant, Astro (*The Jetsons*), The Great Gazoo (*The Flintstones*) and Muttley (*Wacky Races*). This month, thanks to an insightful new book co-written by Takamoto and animation expert Michael Mallory, we get to learn a lot more about his life and times—from his early days as a “street kid” in Los Angeles, to the harrowing period at the Japanese internment camps in Manzanar, to working with Disney’s *Nine Old Men* and reaching the heights of his toon career at Hanna-Barbera. Along the way, he reminisces about the legacy of the animation legends he worked with and offers interesting comments about his own creations. “I think that one of the reasons a character like Scooby-Doo has become iconic is because we were able to find just the right level of stylization,” he writes. “He’s a dog, but he’s drawn as sort of a human being, and we could feel when it was right and when we had overstepped the line that would make the scene fall flat.” This and many other sharp observations make this memoir a must-read for any fan of animation and pop culture in general. The general feeling you get after putting it down is like ending a wonderful meal with a hugely talented friend, who was kind enough to share his wisdom and a lifetime of experiences with you.



The Art of Monsters vs. Aliens

By Linda Sunshine

(Newmarket Press, \$40)

Another month, another great glossy “art of” hardcover! Although many of us have come to take these beautifully produced tomes on our favorite new animated features for granted, there’s really nothing quite like going to a bookstore and thumbing through the pages of these great illustrated collections that come out just in time for the movies’ release dates! Sunshine, who has penned books on a wide variety of pics—from *The Wizard of Oz* and *E.T.* to *Saving Private Ryan* and *Open Season*—does a nice job of offering details about the making of DreamWorks Animation’s first 3-D movie. However, the real *raison d’être* for this volume is the inclusion of almost 400 detailed illustrations and sketches that brought directors Rob Letterman and Conrad Vernon’s visions to life (three cheers to storyboard artists Alfred Gimeno, Athanassios Vakalis and Anthony Zierhut). Newcomers to the art and craft of animation will also be able to pick up info on the animation process and the creation of the 3D environments as well. All of that and a forward by everyone’s favorite comic Stephen Colbert (who voices the U.S. president in the movie!). Now that’s what we call an irresistible gift from the house of jefe Katzenberg to yours.



— Ramin Zahed

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It's a Cracking New Game, Gromit!

Telltale Games delivers an awesome new series of games for two beloved Aardman characters.

by Ramin Zahed

It's a well-known fact that if you're a game designer dealing with characters as universally revered as Nick Park's Wallace and Gromit, you definitely have your work cut out for you. Fortunately, the team at San Rafael, Calif.-based Telltale Games that worked on the new *Wallace & Gromit's Grand Adventures* project knew exactly how to handle the beloved Aardman duo.

"We had been working on our *Sam & Max* games but were looking to develop new games based on existing properties," says Dave Bogen, lead art director at Telltale. "Wallace & Gromit was one property that we were hugely interested in. So we basically built Wallace's living room in Maya and borrowed lines from one of their films and showed them what we could do back in the spring of 2007, and I guess they liked our approach."

Bogen points out that the previous games featuring the mild-mannered inventor and his clever dog were action platformers, while his team was going straight for the humor and the delightfully British style of stop-motion animation. "We went into great pain to make sure they did the same type of things they do in the shorts," he adds. "Our project is all about stories, puzzles, dialog and character interaction as opposed to Gromit running around with a gun!"

Art director Peter Sakel says Aardman was

very concerned about the Britishness of everything associated with the characters. "They wanted the game not to be too Americanized," says Sakel. "They vetted the actual scripts and made sure that we got the language right, because so much of their charm is based on their particular regional origin."

To that end, Telltale tapped Tristan Davis, a writer for popular British satire magazine *Private Eye* to work on the scripts. Aardman actually provided the studio with the characters' original plasticine models, which have



been faithfully re-created in-game, complete with the thumb marks and scratches from the real things. Perhaps the only thing that's missing is the voice of Peter Sallis, who has portrayed Wallace in the past. However, chances are audiences will have a hard time noticing this detail, as the new actor doing the job does a killer imitation of Sallis' calm and clueless tone.

Four Fantastic Adventures

As it has done before for the *Sam & Max* titles, Telltale will release the *Wallace & Gromit* games in waves. The first four episodes ready to hit Xbox Live and the PC this spring are *Fright of the Bumblebees*, *The Last Resort*, *Muzzled* and *Boogeyman*. "In the first episode, they are running a honey-making business out of their basement," says Sakel. "Of course, too much honey is ordered, so they have to get lots of flowers and giant bees!"

Fans will be happy to know that several new characters—including a new love interest for Wallace—have also been added to the mix. "They all have the same mouth shape and big googly eye balls," notes Sakel. "Of course, the character design had to all be approved by the team at Aardman."

Bogen and Sakel lead a team of 25 employees through great lengths to make sure their CG animation came close to the charming stop-motion style of Aardman's Bristol studio. "It's a compromise," says Bogen. "When you try to do stop-motion on a computer, it doesn't come close, so you have to pull back. What you want from a game experience is really different from what you look for in a movie experience."

As Sakel also explains, the two companies have different approaches to their creative projects. "Aardman is an amazing studio that every one of us admires—their process is totally meticulous and is driven by quality," he notes. "We are a studio that has thrived on efficiency and delivering our games as quickly as we can, so we had to adjust to their process. They work two years on a short film, while we do four short films in four or five months! Our process is geared toward doing graphic, cartoony characters, so we could have gone for a more stylized version of Wallace and Gromit, but we really wanted to get something that was texturally close to the original world of the characters."

In short, the Telltale folks are pretty thrilled that they're giving families a series of games that will let them explore the world of their favorite plasticine heroes. "We do feel that we do a pretty good job with the other games that we have created, but this is our fast crack at something that will be reaching a wide audience of already-established fans," concludes Bogen. "You don't need really fast fingers to play these games. A sense of humor and appreciation for their world is all you need." And that's cracking fantastic news, mates. ■

To learn more about the game and sample it, visit www.telltalegames.com/wallaceandgromit.

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Revenge of the Sci-Fi Victims

Monsters vs. Aliens, DreamWorks' latest epic, puts vaguely familiar characters from our favorite '50s movies into a ginormous stereoscopic package.

by Barbara Robertson

It all started with the monsters in Cannes. The monsters in a script, that is. Conrad Vernon, who had just finished directing the 2004 film *Shrek 2* with Andrew Adamson and Kelly Asbury, was in Cannes promoting that film and was reading scripts during his down time. One of the scripts was based on the Rex Havoc comic-book series. "It had monsters in it," Vernon says. "But the concept—sci-fi horror—wasn't what I wanted. I thought it would be great to do a film from the monsters' point of

view, not the people's point of view." The greenlight team at DreamWorks liked that approach enough to assign an artist to the project.

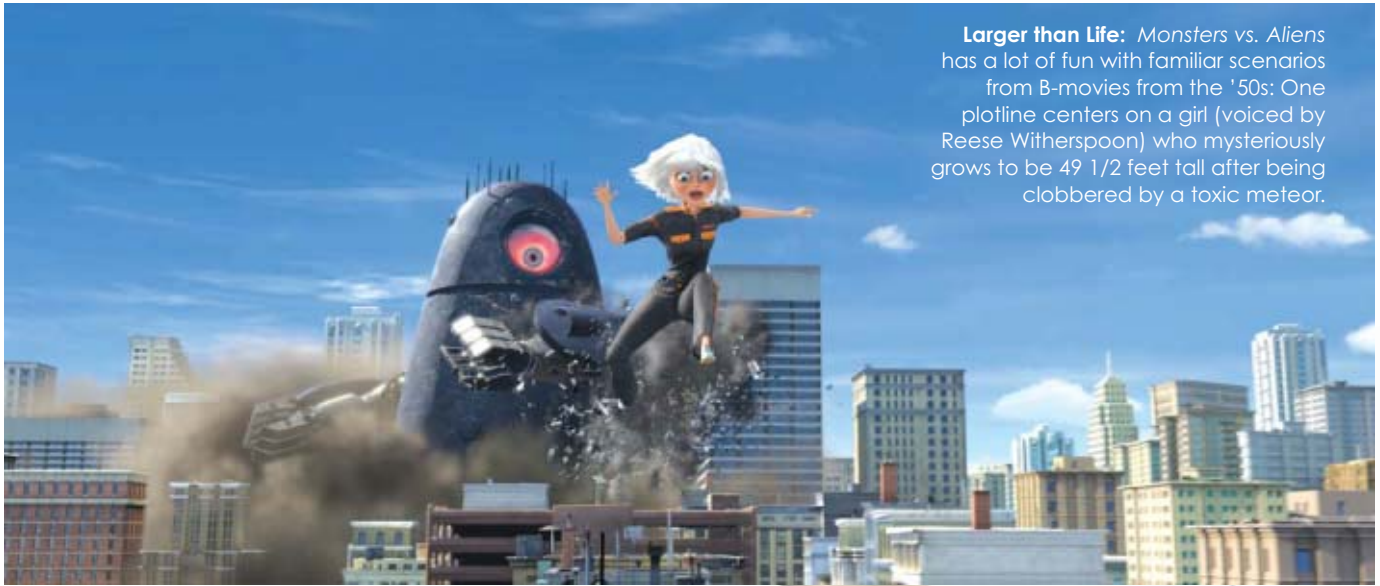
Meanwhile, Rob Letterman, who had directed the 2004 film *Shark Tale* with Bibi Bergeron and Vicky Jensen,

had begun working on an idea for an animated feature with a *Dirty Dozen* type of theme. DreamWorks suggested marrying the two concepts—monsters from the 1950s with prisoners given a suicide mission in return for the promise of freedom. The merging result be-

came *Monsters vs. Aliens*, directed by Vernon and Letterman.

"Monsters versus aliens was always part of the concept," Vernon says. "We put the two concepts together





Larger than Life: *Monsters vs. Aliens* has a lot of fun with familiar scenarios from B-movies from the '50s: One plotline centers on a girl (voiced by Reese Witherspoon) who mysteriously grows to be 49 1/2 feet tall after being clobbered by a toxic meteor.



Conrad Vernon

and had the monsters locked up for the past 50 years in a secret military facility. When an alien menace attacks, none of the military branches can do anything about it. So, they create a team of monsters to throw at the alien menace as a Hail Mary pass."



Dave Burgess

First, Vernon and Letterman needed to pick some monsters. After starting with a dozen, they reduced the potential cast to five: The creature from the Black Lagoon, the 50-foot woman, the blob, the human fly and Godzilla. Then, they decided to create their own monsters.



Rob Letterman

"We decided, first, because of all the rights problems it would be easier to come up with our own," Vernon says. "And, second, we wanted to."

The creature from the Black Lagoon merged with King Kong to become The Missing Link (Will Arnett). The human fly morphed into Dr. Cockroach, Ph.D. (Hugh Laurie). Insectosaurus (Jimmy Kimmel) is a 350-pound grub that can shoot silk out its nose. Susan Mur-

phy from Modesto, also known as Ginormica (Reese Witherspoon) is a 49-and-a-half-foot woman. And, B.O.B. (Seth Rogen), a clever abbreviation for Bicarbonate Ostylezene Benzoate, is a one-eyed gelatinous mass created by accidentally mixing a genetically altered tomato with ranch-flavored des-

matators. "Generally, we have the supervising animators each run a sequence with a team of six to nine animators," Burgess says. "When they finish one sequence, they move on to the next. But, we were getting the story in bits and pieces. We still had each supervisor run a sequence, but we cast their teams based on how much



"This is kind of a perfect movie for 3-D. Our main character is [almost] 50 feet tall and there's no better way of showing that than by seeing that depth go away. You can really feel that General Monger is tiny, and [Ginormica] is gigantic."

—*Monsters vs. Aliens* co-director Conrad Vernon

sert topping. General W. R. Monger (Kiefer Sutherland) sends the monsters on their mission at President Hathaway's (Stephen Colbert) request.

Dave Burgess led the team of animators who brought the characters to life, a core group of 35 animators that swelled to 50 during the final weeks of production, with the help of five supervising ani-

work they had and how many people they needed. People like to work with their gang, but this time, the animators benefited from working with each of our talented supervisors who have strengths in different directions."

Riggers based the controls for most of the characters roughly on PDI/DreamWorks' generic "Man A" rig.



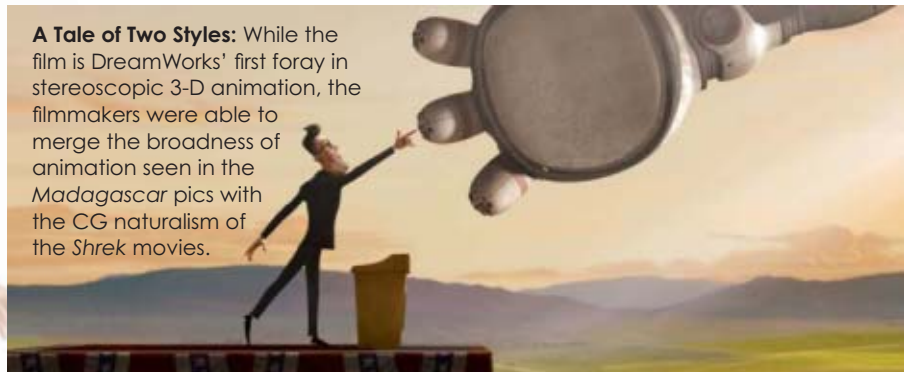
"Once you know how to use the rig for one, the controls are similar for the others," Burgess says. The tricky bits were the tails. Link and Insectosaurus both have long tails and Burgess wanted the tails to drag on the ground, so the crew devised a way to stick the tails to the ground plane.

In addition, Burgess asked the riggers to do a full body simulation for the giant slug to add rippling that would help create believable weight and mass. Giving the right weight to Susan, the giant woman, was also a challenge. "We didn't want her to lumber like a Godzilla," Burgess says. "But, she isn't a normal-sized person, either." Because we see Susan in her normal size as well as her Ginormica expansion, the riggers and animators needed to make sure she stayed on model through the size shifts.

Dr. Cockroach was Burgess's favorite character to animate. "We could explore the contrast between a brilliant, elegant man in control and out of control," Burgess says. "He has a huge cockroach head, like a toothpick with a giant olive on top, so he was fun design-wise." For the alien Gallaxhar (Rainn Wilson), riggers devised an FK/IK system to help control his six tentacles and four eyes.

B.O.B. was the most challenging because of his gelatinous blob-like qualities. "He's a character and a fluid simulation," Burgess says. "I don't think anyone has created a character that elaborate and flexible, with a head and base, but no body." Animators

A Tale of Two Styles: While the film is DreamWorks' first foray in stereoscopic 3-D animation, the filmmakers were able to merge the broadness of animation seen in the *Madagascar* pics with the CG naturalism of the *Shrek* movies.



could work with a stand-in version of B.O.B. composed of blue rings with an eyeball in the middle; he turned into a blob once the crew rendered him.

For the style, the team settled on a compromise between the broadness of animation in *Madagascar* and the naturalism of *Shrek*. "We kept going back to Chuck Jones," Burgess says. "We'd stay in a pose as long as we could and then explode out and end up in another great attitude. The more we could milk those beautiful poses, the more successful the acting."

Because DreamWorks authored the film in stereoscopic 3-D from the beginning, animators viewed all their dailies in stereo. "We had to be super careful," Burgess says. "Stereo is not forgiving at all for cheated eye-lines, and hands almost touching had to be right next to each other."

Stereo 3-D was also a learning process for the directors. "We'd gone three to four months into production when Jeffrey [Katzenberg] said that

we would do the film in 3-D," Vernon says. "3-D didn't change the story; everything is in support of the story. This is kind of a perfect movie for 3-D. Our main character is [almost] 50 feet tall and there's no better way of showing that than by seeing that depth go away. You can really feel that General Monger is tiny, and she is gigantic."

Creating a film that merges two eyes—two cameras—to create one deep image is a good analogy for the working relationship between directors Vernon and Letterman who had to merge two different ideas—monsters fighting aliens and the "dirty dozen"—into one story.

"If you're leading a team with two visionaries in charge, you have to get that vision straight," Vernon says. Judging by the final results, they certainly did. ■

DreamWorks Animation's *Monsters vs. Aliens* is currently playing in theaters nationwide.

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When Earthlings Attack!

After winning the Best Feature Prize at Ottawa, Aristomenis Tsirbas' indie labor of love, *Battle for Terra*, is ready for its 3-D blitz.

Only a few weeks after DreamWorks' splashy *Monsters vs. Aliens* opened in 3-D theaters across the country, a smaller-scale indie movie about a different kind of alien invasion will debut in glorious 3-D on select screens. Directed by Aristomenis Tsirbas and written by Evan Spiliotopoulos, *Battle for Terra* offers a refreshing twist on the old aliens-invading-Earth storyline. In this truly independently produced feature, it's the human beings who are the invaders and the aliens who are living peacefully on their own planet.

Tsirbas, who has an impressive background as a vfx artist—he's worked on *Titanic*, *Hellboy*, *Star Trek: Voyager* and *Enterprise*—made a splash in the animation festival circuit with the shorts *Freak* in 2001 and *Terra* in 2003. As it turns out, the seven-minute-long *Terra* became a blueprint for the new movie, which will be released by Roadside Attractions in May.

"I loved the novels of H.G. Wells when I was a kid, and really got into *War of the Worlds*," recalls Tsirbas during a phone interview from his studio in the heart of Hollywood. "But the

aliens were always portrayed as shallow, evil beings. I wanted to know more about them. Why would they want to invade Earth? Why would they follow the pattern of imperialism and conquest that's parallel to human history? So in my movie, I tried to turn things around and explore that idea from the point of view of the aliens ... what if humans invaded their planet?"

Not one to opt for easy solutions and pat storylines, Tsirbas also wanted to stray away from any black-and-white depictions. "As the film develops, we learn that the humans aren't evil either—they feel that they have no choice—while it's also revealed that although the aliens lead an idyllic, peaceful life now, they had a very dark past as well."

Like many indie animators working around the world today, Tsirbas was weary of playing the waiting game with the big studios. "I guess you can say that our naïveté worked in our favor," he says. "Our producer Dane Allan Smith and I had worked together in visual effects for many years, but we'd never done anything like this before. We really didn't know what we were going against ...

We didn't want the larger studios to make the decisions for us ... and it was taking them forever to get it off the ground. So, we decided to take things in to our own hands."



Aristomenis Tsirbas

Both Smith and Tsirbas also point out that they were very lucky to run into the team at Hollywood-based studio Snoot Entertainment. "There are so few outlets for emerging filmmakers today," says Smith. "Having a presence at fantasy and shorts festivals helped us a lot, and the timing was right, too. The folks at Snoot saw our short and wanted to get involved with the movie."

Smith says it took his team months to develop the pipeline for the feature—a framework that would make sense economically. "We reverse engineered a software package we call the Beaver project that exports files out of LightWave into Maya," he notes. "We created an animatic over an eight-month period in LightWave, then exported it to Maya, and our character animators would feed the MDF files back to LightWave. We really maximized the efficiency of both packages without getting bogged down."

As Tsirbas explains, the team's background in episodic TV effects helped them create a sophisticated CG-animated world with remarkable efficiency and speed. In 2005, they took a key scene from the project and screened it at SIGGRAPH, and given the great feedback they received, it was a



Loving the Alien: The creators of the new CG-animated indie movie *Battle for Terra* were able to produce their 3-D sci-fi epic for a fraction of the cost of a big studio pic by developing new software, streamlining the animation process and sticking close to their original goals and timelines.

breeze to put together top-notch voice talent (Dennis Quaid, Brian Cox, Danny Glover, James Garner, Evan Rachel Wood and Chris Evans, to name a few) for the feature.

The decision to up the ante and make the feature a stereoscopic 3-D release was made about two years ago. "We knew that 3-D was a strong possibility, but when we started out, the technology wasn't as prominent as it is today," says Smith. "However, we took certain precautions in the event that we did decide to go 3-D. Every scene existed in a true virtual environment and we didn't add a lot of compositing trickery which would've compounded the transition to 3-D later on in the game."

The team added a second camera and

proprietary software was developed to control the depth of the scene and the divergence of the objects in each shot. Smith says overall, the transfer to 3-D cost about one-eighth of the total budget. "For a more expensively produced feature, this would have been a lot more," he points out. "Everything is relative—Let's just say that ours was about 1/20 of the total budget for *WALL•E*! The biggest expense was getting the media to the theaters."

As a filmmaker, Tsirbas is most proud of the fact that he and his relatively small team of talented artists (at the peak of production, 20 people were working at the studio) were able to do what many considered an impossible dream. "I think the fact that we all

worked closely together under one roof helped us with our daily give-and-take and exchange of ideas," he adds. "We set a very tight schedule and adhered to it. We had a finite amount of tasks. Because most of the creative work was done during the animatic stage, it helped us with the camera moves and lighting stages."

The journey to *Terra* and back has been a huge learning process for Tsirbas and company. "I think if you have a dream to make it in this business, you are going to need that passion to fuel the energy and hard work," says the director. "You also need thick skin because you'll hear the word 'no' a thousand times. If you love what you're doing, then the hard work won't feel so bad."

He also believes that the outlook is quite good for indie animators who like to branch out from the family genre. "We have films like *Waltz with Bashir* broadening the perception of animation everywhere," notes Tsirbas. "Animation has taken a long time to break through the family genre. Pixar is also helping this process by diversifying the art form. This helps the indie animated films come to the market and get distribution. Just like digital video changed the game in the past, I think we're witnessing an indie animation revolution, thanks to the availability of off-the-shelf software used by animators. It's all good!" ■

"In my movie, I tried to turn things around and explore that idea from the point of view of the aliens ... what if humans invaded their planet?"

—Director Aristomenis Tsirbas



Lionsgate and Roadside Attractions will release *Battle for Terra* in theaters on May 1. For more info, visit www.battleforterra.com.



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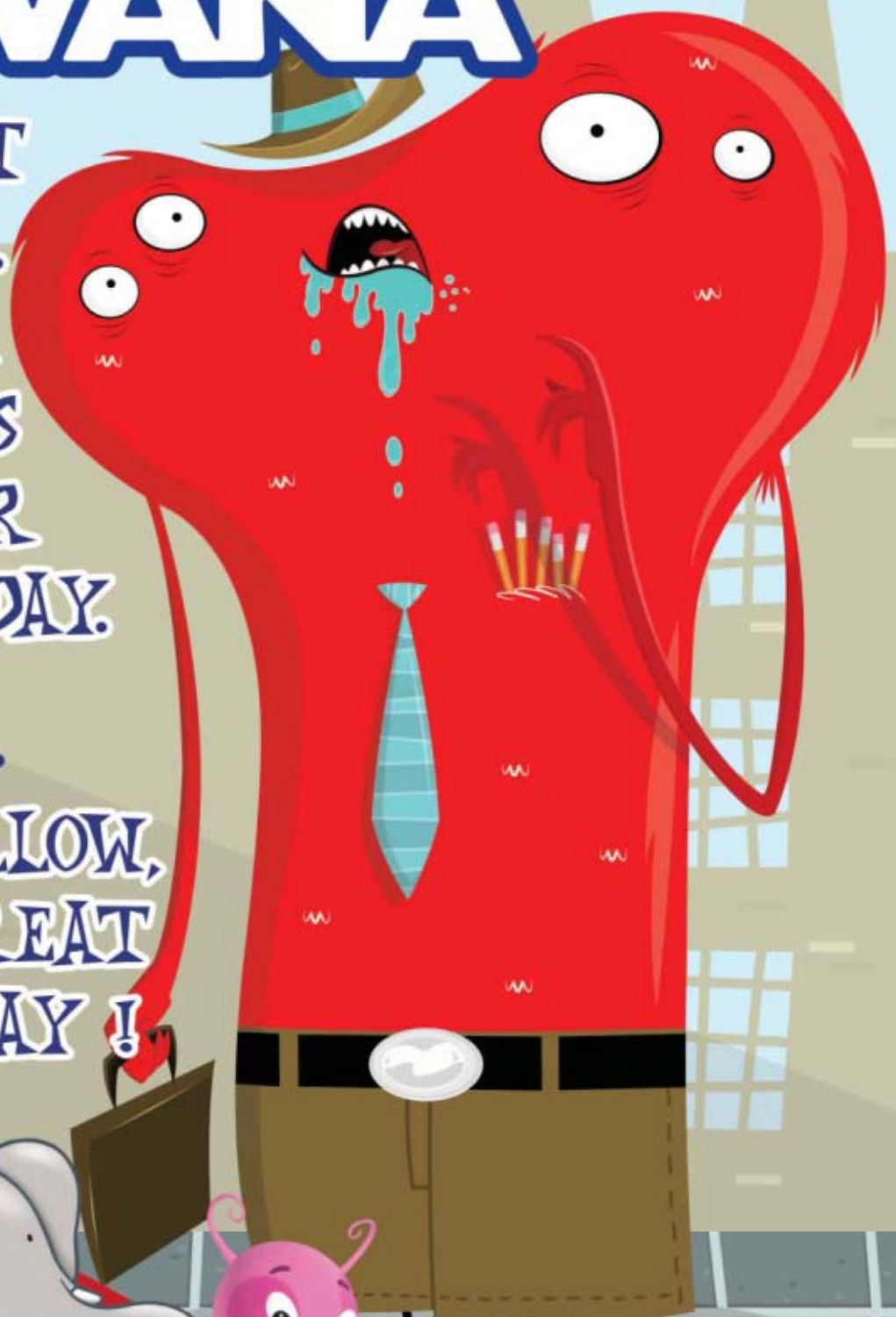
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Heroes Old and New ... and Blue?

X-Men, Superman, Freakazoid and more mix it up on DVD and Blu-ray this month.

by Mercedes Milligan

X-Men: Marvel Comic Book Collection Vols. 1 and 2 [Disney, \$23.99 each]

Geeks of the world, rejoice! Just in time for the new Wolverine movie, the nostalgia-licious, yellow-clad animated '90s incarnations of



Marvel's mutant heroes are on disc at last. Created by Larry Houston and Frank Squillace, the 2D series ran on FOX from 1992-'97, and its popularity with kids and fanboys helped launch a slew of comics-based TV toons.

Featuring favorite characters Wolverine, Cyclops, Storm, Rogue, Jean Grey, Gambit and more, the two disc sets pack 16 and 17 episodes, respectively, with Vol. 2 culminating in the dramatic "Phoenix Saga" five-parter. And if you don't think these sets are essential to your toon collection, 10 bucks says suddenly having the iconic theme song stuck in your head will change your mind. You're humming it right now, aren't you? (Doo diddle dooooo do-do...)

[Release date: April 28]



Jetsons: The Movie [Universal, \$14.98]

After releasing in other, more fortunate regions, this feature romp with everyone's favorite futuristic family will finally hit shelves in North America. The film, released in 1990 and produced by the Jetsons' homestead studio, Hanna-Barbera, has been the source of some fan controversy. Despite being produced by H 'n' B themselves, directed by toon legend Iwao Takamoto and featuring the



final performances of both George O'Hanlon and Mel Blanc, fans of the classic '60s toon were upset when Janet Waldo's performance as Judy was scrapped and re-recorded by pop princess Tiffany. Despite the lukewarm reception, the film has high points: The animation stays true to the series design work while enriching it with more

time-intensive details, and critics have commended the early CGI work utilized. Plus, the film's plot features environmental themes that still resonate today. You also get to enjoy hot movie tracks like XXL's "Jetsons' Rap." Oh, yes!

[Release date: April 28]

Freakazoid!: Complete Second Season [Warner, \$26.98]

Thanks to this certifiably zany WB toon from the genius trifecta of Stephen Spielberg, Bruce Timm and Paul Dini, gawky computer nerds across the nation had a small glimmer of hope: Maybe one lonely night on IRC, a power surge would suck them into the mysterious "Internet" and grant them super powers, insanity and a buff blue bod. Sadly this has *probably* never happened, but it made a great cartoon premise. Originally slated to be a straight-up superhero show, Spielberg had a change of heart and recruited Tom Ruegger and the *Animaniacs* writers to turn *Freakazoid!* into flat-out farce. Thus the legendary adventures of Freakazoid, Sgt. Cosgrove and the bizarrely ever-present Emmitt Nervend were born. This two-disc set completes the series,



and is chock full of manic episodes replete with hilarious mini-segments (cue Lord Bravery!). The set also boasts a full season's commentary, a look back at crafting the final episode, and the original "Bonjour Lobey" spoof demo by Richard Stone. Here's hoping the DVD release brings some Freakazoid cosplayers out of the woodwork for Comic-Con.

[Release date: April 21]

Tiny Toon Adventures Season 1, Vol. 2 [Warner, \$44.98]

Aiso out this month is another Spielbergian collaboration. Produced by the Hollywood tycoon's Amblin Entertainment and WB's studio, the series was created by talented toon writer Tom Ruegger, though then-WB prez Terry Semel is credited with the original idea. The show followed the colorful adventures of young cartoon animals (modeled after their *Looney Tunes* big bros.) attending the Acme Tooniversity and get-

ting into mischief. With a team of talented writers, including Paul Dini, and a who's-who cast of voice actors, the Emmy Award-winning series deservedly ran for five years and was a favorite with the Saturday morning crowd—despite the crush of "baby" toon series at the time. Volume 2 packs 30 episodes into a four-disc set. Extras haven't been announced at the time of printing, but Volume 1 featured a cute developmental docu about the cuddly li'l stinkers, so the door is open.

[Release date: April 21]



Max Fleischer's Superman 1941-1942 [Warner, \$26.98]

Moving from the merely retro to the bonafide classics: This month, all 17 of the original Fleischer *Superman* shorts (both the Fleischer and Famous Studios works) are available as a stand-alone collection. Crafted with a learn-as-you-go system of rotoscoping and free-hand drawing and voiced by radio series stars Bud Collyer and Joan Alexander as Clark and his gal, the theatrical toons drew praise immediately—the first outing even earned an Oscar nomination. Despite their popularity, Famous Studios was forced to discontinue the series due to the



dramatic expense of production: The first episode's budget was equivalent to \$1.3 million in today's money, with the full run totaling over \$13 million. Presented on two discs with 170 minutes of shorts, these power-

ful pre-war toons are accompanied by the "First Flight: The Fleischer Superman Series" and all-new "The Man, The Myth, Superman" featurettes. Using the superior vault footage used for WB's 2006 remastered releases, this set does Man of Steel-style justice to the painstakingly crafted animation and inspiring, innovative artistry that made these shorts classics the moment they hit screens over 60 years ago.

[Release date: April 7] ■

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The Wooden Boy Gets a New Polish

Actor Dick Jones talks about working with Disney and voicing *Pinocchio*, which is out this month as a special 70th Anniversary DVD and Blu-ray release.

by Jake Friedman

Pinocchio may have not had a much deeper meaning than a transparent moral allegory when it was penned by Carlo Collodi in 1883. By 1940, however, Walt Disney turned the tale into a story about wishing your dreams into reality, and thereby shaped the mission statement of his enchanting multi-media company. Now *Pinocchio* has been released as a 70th Anniversary Platinum Edition DVD and high-definition Blu-ray, with enhanced sound and picture (Jiminy is finally as green as the artists intended!) and complete with some delightful extras.

Besides an hour-long documentary on the making of the film, there's commentary by Leonard Maltin, animator Eric Goldberg and film historian J. B. Kaufman (keep your eyes peeled for his book on the making of *Pinocchio*), as well as a pop-up fact option and deleted scenes. Also included are some informative but truncated features on Walt's sweatbox sessions and the (once clandestine) technique of using live-action footage for animation reference.

"They dressed us up in costume and built a set to do the scene where J. Worthington Foul-fellow said, 'Your name should be in lights,' and we danced down the road singing 'Hi Diddy Dee, an actor's life for me,'" recalls actor Dick Jones, who voiced the famous wooden boy when he was only 11. "They choreographed a little routine for the three of us, and the animators worked off that because they just couldn't figure out how to put it together."

Jones tried out for the part of Pinocchio in 1938. "At first, Walt heard people audition who were imitating kids," says Jones. "When he heard it, he said he wanted to have a real little boy. Then there were 200 of us boys auditioning

for the part. Over four or six weeks it boiled down to just two of us. I have no idea why he chose me, but I was disappointed for my friend, who lost out. However, he got a better job: Sam McKim got a 40-year job at Walt Disney Studios as an artist."



Jones recorded all his dialogue over an 18-month period between 1938 and 1939. At every session, Walt was in the recording booth. "He really didn't impress me, other than the fact that he was the boss," says Jones of Walt. "I took any advice he gave, I did what he wanted, but any direction he gave he handed to me through his director, because Walt Disney was a firm believer in the chain of command."

Jones did all his scenes with the other actors beside him. "We worked just like a radio program, we stood face to face and read our scripts the way we marked them up. I worked with Frankie Darro who played Lampwick way back in 1934 on *Little Men*, and The Blue Fairy, Evelyn Venable—she and I finished a Hopalong Cassidy picture a

week before we started *Pinocchio*."

Jones shared a method that the Disney Studio adopted to achieve accurate lip sync: "When I was working off the script, they put a small 8mm camera on me—they didn't shoot up close because of the sound of the camera gears, but they put a long lens on it—and they would just shoot my nose, lips and chin. They put their own expressions in the eyes, but they wanted the correct formation of the words to make the animation as life-like as possible." When he wasn't working, Jones remembers goofing around with Walt. "Something he did with everybody else but in-



Dick Jones

cluded me was he taught me how to throw push pins. And we had games and played push-pin darts. I never could beat him."

Jones, who appeared in numerous movies (including *The Major and the Minor*, *The Adventures of Mark Twain* and many Westerns) retired from acting in the '50s, but he enjoys sharing with oth-

ers the fact that he voiced Pinocchio all those years ago. "At the time I did *Pinocchio* it was just a job," he says. "I enjoyed it, and I enjoyed working with the people, but no one at that time knew it was going to blossom into the legend it came out to be—I just happened to be there at the right time and the right place, and I got to be a so-called 'Disney Legend' also, and that is a wonder of all wonders. I'm very blessed to be a part of that." ■

Jake Friedman is a New York-based animator. Visit him at www.jakefriedman.net.

You can pick up Disney's new two-disc *Pinocchio 70th Anniversary Platinum Edition* on DVD (\$29.99) and Blu-ray (\$35.99) in stores and online this month.

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The Name's Oso, Special Agent Oso

A new animated preschool show on Playhouse Disney pushes the visual envelope while gently spoofing secret agent movies.

James Bond and all the other Cold War-era spies have inspired their share of clever spoofs throughout the years. However, you'll have to look really hard to find a preschool show that delivers a spot-on homage to the classic genre. This month, viewers will be able to enjoy a very young take on the smooth international globetrotters when Special Agent Oso begins his animated adventures on Playhouse Disney.

Centering on an accident-prone but motivated panda bear plush toy voiced by Sean Astin, *Special Agent Oso* helps kids accomplish everyday tasks such as mailing a letter, using a library card or brushing their teeth. Maintaining a positive attitude (Oso's favorite catchphrase happens to be "It's all part of the plan!"), our hero gets his assignments at the beginning of each segment by the unseen Mr. Dos. Helping him with his many missions is his computerized sidekick, Paw Pilot, and the robot video-cam bug, known as Shutterbug! Clever, right? That's not all—the 11-minute episodes have tongue-in-cheek James Bondish titles like "Gold Flower," "Live and Let Ride," "A View to a Book"

and "Carousel Royale" and feature theme songs that may create a bit of nostalgia for older viewers.

The show's creator and co-exec producer Ford Riley says the inspiration for Oso came one day as he was watching TV with his own kids. "Back then I was working in animation, but not on preschool shows," recalls Riley, whose credits include *Robotech: The Shadow Chronicles*, *Recess*, *Teacher's Pet* and *Higglytown Heroes*. "I saw what my own kids responded to and what they didn't. I thought to myself, if were to do a preschool show, I was going to have secret agents and spies in it—and I would have stuffed animals help kids with tasks that they could really relate to. For example, I remember how excited my daughter used to get when she got to help out with simple tasks like mailing a letter or putting the milk back in the fridge."

Another important aspect of the show is that the creators break all of Oso's missions into three simple steps. Riley says when his son was diagnosed with autism at age three, he learned about the three-step method for his special curriculum. "This teaching

method had a big impact on me and my outlook on children's television," he notes. "If you're a parent of a child with autism, you'll recognize this three-step method in the special therapy your child receives. Our show helps break down everyday tasks to three simple steps—it's not designed for special kids, but we feel it's accessible to every kid on our planet."



Ford Riley



Jamie Mitchell

Farewell to Interstitial Form!

Riley pitched his idea to the development execs at Disney TV back in 2004, but the studio didn't actually greenlight the project until three years later. "We developed it as an interstitial, and we teamed up with Korea's Sunwoo Animation and the design outfit CrazyBird Studio to create the special look of the show," he notes. "It's inspired by stop-motion but it isn't—it's actually digital cut-outs and Flash—but for some reason, it reminds me of the Rankin-Bass shows." Disney liked the project so much that it was decided to produce it as a regular preschool series.

One of the challenges faced by Riley and the show's director and co-executive producer Jamie Mitchell was how to keep the show interesting for the parents without complicating the content for the youngsters. "We were walking a fine line between an action-adventure show and an educational show," says Riley. "There were things that the network's Standards and Practices [office] would say no to ... like no, Oso can't be hopping on hot stones in a volcano! Or we'd have an episode with Oso in a library, so we thought it would be fun to have him belly flop on one of the stools ... so they said, no, that's imitable behavior and you can't do that on a preschool show, so now he flies with a jetpack in the library. I think the challenge is to rein in those ideas and find a creative way for our special agent to solve his dilemma."



For Mitchell, one of the most important aspects of the show was creating a tangible universe that was full of textures and authentic images from the real world. "We were trying to break the barrier between the audience who's watching and the characters on screen, so viewers feel like they can reach in and pick the characters right up," he says.

Mitchell, a veteran of the TV animation scene who has worked on shows such as *Hey Arnold!*, *DuckTales*, *The Little Mermaid* and *House of Mouse*, says he was thrilled to work with the Seoul-based design studio CrazyBird to develop the special visuals of the show—which is a nice mix of digital cut-outs, 3D Photoshop and Flash animation. "When we started on the pilot, we were going back and forth about the texture of a sidewalk. It was just like this sidewalk you'd see in New York City and I thought it was cold. I said, 'It needs to be edible,'" says Mitchell. "A couple of days later, we came up with the idea of using a pie crust. We photographed it, digitized it,



though the TV animation landscape is quite different from the world they knew a couple of decades ago, they feel that the toon biz is in a healthy place today. "Back when I started out, the animation scene was very compartmentalized ... today, the more versatile you can be, the more successful you become," says Mitchell. "We are

and now all of the sidewalks and all of the buildings are edible foods."

This quest for authenticity takes Mitchell back to his boyhood, when he used to watch *Gumby* on TV. "I loved *Gumby*'s car—it was totally real to me and I wanted to ride in that car," he recalls. "That's why Oso gets to drive a real car. We actually got a car designer to work with us—he rendered the car in 3D. In another segment, Oso puts on head gear based on a real World War II mask." (One other special trivia bit: The airplane piloted by Oso's colleague, Dotty, is based on the jet Chuck Yeager used to break the sound barrier in 1947!)

Both Mitchell and Riley point out that al-

working with a very small crew in L.A.—at the height of production we have about 20 people, but back then, it was normal to have about 90 people working on a show here in the studio. In today's world, crews are going to be smaller, and you have to do a lot more. So my advice to people who want to get into TV animation is to become a Renaissance person—be more versatile. Overall, you can say that I'm very optimistic about our industry. There's an insatiable appetite out there in the world for what we do!" ■

Special Agent Oso premieres on Disney Channel on Saturday, April 4 at 8 a.m.



Brace Yourself for a Teenage Version of Iron Man!

Nicktoons debuts a stylish new animated series starring a teenaged version of the Marvel superhero.

by Ramin Zahed

If you tune in to the new series *Iron Man: Armored Adventures* expecting an animated version of actor Robert Downey Jr. fighting nefarious characters, you may be in for a little bit of a surprise. The new show, which premieres this month on Nicktoons, offers a younger, more approachable take on the Marvel superhero.

"Frankly, we didn't want to just deliver another great action-adventure series featuring a hero with cool armor and all kinds of high-tech features," says Cort Lane, director of animation development at Marvel. "We wanted to make Iron Man a relatable character for young boys, and seriously, a thirtysomething, womanizing

weapons manufacturer wouldn't really be relevant. We tweaked the storyline a little bit. However, there actually is a comic-book series that offers a similar take on Iron Man. Also, all the key characters and villains remain intact in this 26 half-hour episode season."

Of course, die-hard fans know the Iron

Man character as the hedonistic industrialist introduced in 1963 by Marvel writers Stan Lee and Larry Lieber and artists Don Heck and Jack Kirby in the *Tales of Suspense* comic. The Tony Stark at the center of the new toon is a 16-year-old boy who is the heir to his father's billion-dollar corporation. After he loses

his dad in a tragic accident, he has to rely on his own technology to survive and to battle the dark forces of evil—while dealing with the usual traumas of being a teenager.



Cort Lane

"We set up the background for the series in the first two episodes, and then, the action really takes off in the third, where audiences get to meet four of the show's super-villains," notes Lane. "When we introduced the show at Comic-Con last year, we got an overwhelmingly positive reaction. Our hero is not a goofy teenager—he's a cool kid. Our co-producer Josh Fine and head writer Chris Yost have made a real effort to tell this story in a very sophisticated way."

The CG-animated show also boasts a slick, modern visual style, thanks to the efforts of the design team at French studio Method Films (which also worked on the series *Skyland* and are collaborating with India's DQ Entertainment on the upcoming *Little Nick/Le Petit Nicolas* production). "Method is the creative shop and the studio that runs the production, while much of the heavy lifting is done by the team at DQ in India. Personally, I think it's the best looking show that will be on the air this year. The character designs and the level of animation is extraordinary."

Lane tells us that although the animation is Maya-based, the studio relied on some new proprietary tools to create the special toon-shaded visuals. "Method was very interested in creating a comic-book look, you can see that the characters are toon-shaded with holding lines, while the backgrounds are fully rendered in CG."

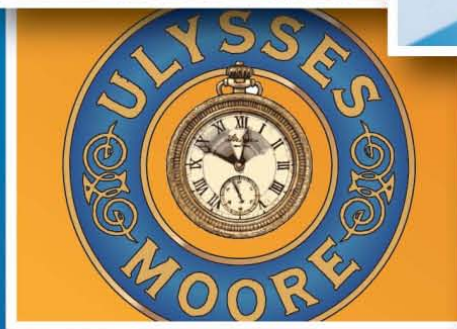
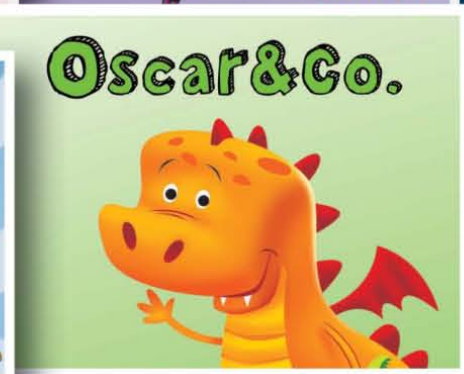
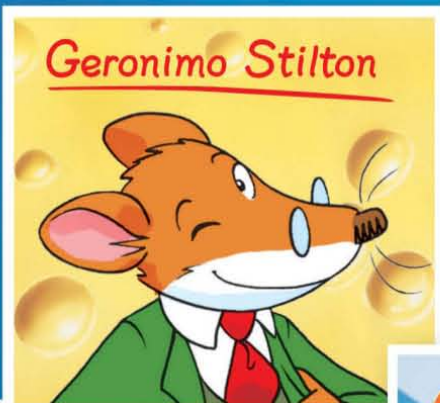
While Marvel has several other animated projects in the works—the upcoming *Black Panther* and *Superhero Squad* to name a few—Lane says the *Iron Man* toon is definitely one of his favorite projects. "I have loved these characters since I was 11," he adds. "You have a great hero, awesome technology and exciting storylines. We think the fans are going to be very pleased once they tune in." ■

***Iron Man: Armored Adventures* premieres at 7 p.m. on Friday, April 24, on Nicktoons.**



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They Come From MIPTV ...

As international animation content producers and buyers head over to Cannes this month (March 30-April 3) in search of the next big thing, we put our feelers out there to bring you news about these shows, even before the market gets rolling. Here are a few items about toons that will debut at MIPTV:

A SWELL SHOW

FreshTV, the successful entity behind Cartoon Network's ratings-grabbing doubleheader of *6Teen* and *Total Drama Island*, is back this year with a new show called **STOKED**. The stylish toon is described as a sitcom about six teenage surfers who work at a famous surf resort one summer, and we think it's also going to be huge with the eight to 12 auds.

"This is a show that my co-creator Jennifer Pertsch and I have been dreaming of making since forever," says **Tom McGillis**, who also created FreshTV's previous hits. "We started to notice that surfing has become something that tweens want to experience as well. We often hear tweens call themselves surfers, even if they've never dipped their toe in the ocean!"

The series' smooth Flash-based animation is handled by Elliott Animation, FreshTV's sister company in Toronto's Liberty Village. "We have taken Flash to new heights with this production," claims McGillis. "We invested a huge amount of time and resources into designing a pipeline that combines traditional, 3D and Flash animation into something that has never been attempted in TV animation before. The results are jaw-dropping!"

McGillis says he and Pertsch (an avid surfer herself) do extensive research on the likes and dislikes of their shows' demo. "That research taught us that today's tweens are incredibly sophisticated in their media consumption," says McGillis. "We never make adult jokes 'for the parents' that

will fly over tweens' heads. We respect our tween audience completely and make shows specifically for them. If some of our jokes fly over their parents' heads, we've done our job!"



Tom McGillis



SPREADING THEIR WINGS

As much as everyone admires butterflies, there haven't been too many shows about these beautiful creatures. Munich-based **Studio100** is answering that call this spring with a new 52 x 5 toon called **Butterfly and Beautyfly**. Aimed at preschoolers, this poetic show follows the adventures of two butterflies as

they explore the different corners of their garden and meet new friends and creatures along the way. The new series has already won several festival honors and been hailed as the best preschool show by the Family League in Belgium. "The show engages children not as passive targets, but as a specific, active and precious audience," says **Patrick Elmendorff**, managing director of Studio100 Media. "Through beautiful animation, the show introduces the little pleasures and great joys of life as well as its doubts and anxieties to younger viewers."



BRB UNLEASHES A NEW DOG

We love it when our pals at Spanish studio **BRB** show us a sneak preview of their upcoming new toons. The team that gave us *Bernard*, *The Imp*, *Angus & Cheryl* and *Suckers* will be hitting the MIP Market with a smashing new CG-animated show about a mail-delivery pooch. **Kambu**, a 104 x 5 high-def package, is produced by Screen 21 and Chako and will be ready for a fall of 2010 delivery. "This is the first CG-animated preschool



show we have created in a long time," says BRB's charming head of co-productions, **Carlos Biern**. "This character has been huge in terms of publishing and consumer products in several countries."

The show finds our dog hero—usually in charge of delivering good news and packages—in a new environment. "Kambu finds himself on a very funny and unique island," explains Biern. "In this strange world, elephants are small, snails move fast and summers are chilly! Not only are the situations quite funny, it also promotes discovery and early-learning principles. You never know, but Kambu could very well be the next Snoopy!"

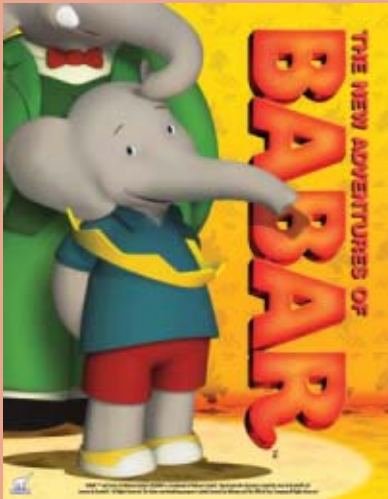
HOT WHEELS AND JUMBO THRILLS

Toronto's toon powerhouse **Nelvana** is bringing contempo takes on two classic brands to the market this year. First up, there's the new 22 x 26 CG-animated **Hot Wheels® Battle Force 5**, which is based on the classic Mattel brand and follows the adventures of five teenage drivers and their ultra-cool vehicles. Their mission, obviously, is saving the world from "the barbaric predators of Vandals and the sinister robotic armies of the Sark!" Billed as the first CG-animated show based on the iconic brand, the series will air on Teletoon in Canada and Cartoon Network in the U.S. on Saturday mornings.

Those with good memories will recall that Nelvana also co-produced the popular *Babar* series (from 1989 to 1991 and from 2000 to 2001). Now

we hear that the studio has teamed up with creative French shop TeamTO to produce 26 episodes of **The New Adventures of Babar**. This fantastic-looking new project will put a CG-animated polish to the beloved children's character, which was first introduced in 1931 by French author Jean de Brunhoff. TF1 in France, YTV in Canada and Playhouse Disney France have already signed up to air the show.

The new toon will focus on King Babar's eight-year-old grandson and will zero in on the special relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Among the new characters introduced in the show are Chiku the monkey (Zephir's daughter), Monroe the porcupine, Zawade the zebra and Jake the hyena. Frankly, Babar is the one elephant in the room that nobody will ever want to ignore.



MODERN MADNESSES

Who says you can't make a modern (rhyming) animated show about adult subjects such as plastic surgery, over-eating and the shallowness of fame? If you need proof that this can be done, just ask **Richard Morss** and **Alastair McIlwain** who have a new project tackling such topics called **Small Tragedies**. Produced by Irish studio **Straandlooper** (*Lifeboat Luke*) in conjunction with Northern Ireland Screen, the sophisticated 26 x 5 series is a collection of darkly comic animated poems about some of the tough-to-stomach aspects of modern culture.



"The rhyming narration to each film enables a fast-paced, non-linear visual story telling technique," explains creator Morss, whose credits include the award-winning series *Tiny Planets*. "The format allows us to tackle difficult and truly tragic subjects such as plastic surgery gone wrong, obesity and the global credit crunch in a way that is thought provoking, but—hopefully—not ultimately negative or depressing."

Morss says he had wanted to create a show about "all the rubbish of our lives, but didn't want to do something filled

with hate and anger!" He adds, "The doggerel idea gave us the chance to do that—and hopefully to be outrageous and funny and black without mortally offending anyone."

Since Morss is a keen observer of the global animation business, we had to get his take on the current economic nightmares facing producers all over the world. "We are trying to get content directly to the consumer as soon as possible in its life. We cannot afford the long-term risks involved with the traditional TV market, and have to 'monetize' our IP in every way we can as soon as we can. Otherwise, you just have to grow vegetables and pray!"

To find out more about the company and its eclectic animated slate, visit www.straandlooper.com.

VGI PAINTS A ROSIE PICTURE

The first things you notice when you watch VGI's new CG-animated preschool toon **Everything's Rosie** are the bright colors and the sharp quality of the animation. "Rosie lives in a futuristic playhouse of every child's dream," says VGI's managing director, **Vickie Corner**. "Her world is instantly striking, contemporary and colorful. The series is characterized by a bold color palette and the innovative fusion of modern design with an organic environment."

Corner says her team was very conscious that the market has been—and still is—dominated by boy-led animation with few shows targeting preschool girls. "We wanted to create a unique, innovative and visually stunning girl-led series with



mutual appeal for boys that would be at the forefront of 21st century animation. We see Rosie as a pre-school icon—the trend-setting, confident big sister whom girls will long to be like and boys will look up to."

The series' head writer Dave Ingham tells us that the toon's mantra is fun and fulfillment through friendship, and that the stories help promote the social skills preschoolers need to move on to the next stage of their lives—that's the school playground!

Everything's Rosie is set to debut on the BBC's CBeebies in the U.K. early next year. "We're in production on the first 26 (11-minute-long) episodes of the series, but the pilot has already shown us that there is a wonderful energy and harmony between the diverse characters and I am continually delighted and intrigued by the refreshing storytelling," adds Corner. Looks like Dora the Explorer just got some fierce 21st-century competitor!



SPINNING A NEW TUNE

Those who can't get enough of those super-cool Gorillaz music videos will probably flip for the new animated series created by London and Belgrade-based studio **Mighty ToonHeadz**. The brainchild of pals **Zak Vracevic** and **Zoran Jevtic**, the show is called **Mighty Lil' Spinnerz** and is about a group of kids who find a magical gramophone with special powers. Yes, they have to fight evil forces, but they also dig cool tunes and each episode will have guest voices and music from the world of rock/pop.

The 52 x 22 show offers a great-looking blend of Maya-based CG animation and custom shaders. "Both pilot episode and music video cost us about \$400,000," says Vracevic, who has a background in the European music business. "As we did everything in HD, we think that's pretty good. Music videos (of this quality) alone can cost over \$100K! We also managed to do some work on our soon-to-be-launched website, with some great games developed using the Unity3D engine."

According to the producer, the show received some great feedback at MIPTV and MIPCOM last year. "This year, we will hopefully have a full 22-minute pilot episode as well as a music video to show," says Vracevic. "We already have financing confirmed for the first 26 episodes, but we want to do 52!"

So how does the toon biz compare to the music industry? "Big boys from the big networks don't reply to e-mails or phone calls, just like the music business," says Vracevic. "There are exceptions, of course—Marc Buhaj [VP, Jetix Europe], raise your hand! We had to pull people by their sleeves to have a look at our trailer at MIPCOM! But after the first 20 seconds, it was, 'Wow! Who are you guys!?'"

JUST LIKE YOU'RE THERE!

Don't forget to visit www.animationmagazine.net for our MIPTV Market Showcase and daily reports filed by editor Ramin Zahed.



CHILD'S PLAY

Mike Young, CEO of MoonScoop Group, tells *Animag* that his studio's new animated show **Chloe's Closet** has a special meaning for him. "We created it based on ideas inspired by my own granddaughter, Chloe," he says. "My wife Liz and I watched the way Chloe interacted with her little duck security blanket that she had named Lovely Carrot. When she played with it she seemed completely mesmerized and was truly enjoying the magical world she was creating in her mind."

Young says he and his team are hoping to re-create that same dynamic of how kids play and interact with these imaginary friends in the show, which is created from a child's perspective.

The series is an animation hybrid of Flash, 2D and 3D CGI sets. It has a preschool math curriculum and features models

that parents and children can make using household items. "We are very proud of the way the show has turned out," he enthuses.



SUPERCARGED BROS

Studio B's follow-up toon to *Martha Speaks* and *Kid vs. Kat* will be a cool, bionic outing. The Vancouver shop has announced that it's teaming up with **Slap Happy Cartoons** to create a 2D-animated series called **B.O.O.M. Boys**. This nicely designed 52 x 11 toon follows the adventures of three bionic brothers named Flip, Ollie and Pick, who build awesome gadgets and tools to escape the evil military agency that created them. The show was created by Studio B veterans Josh Mephram, Greg Sullivan, Kathy Rocchio and Vito Viscomi. We can't wait to see the crossover episode where the bionic boys meet the evil Kat!



CHEEKY CHUMS!

Another comic-book character will be leaping into the world of animation. This time around, it's time for British icons **Dennis and Gnasher** (from U.K.'s *Beano* comic) to take center stage. "The new show will combine a bold graphic approach using outlines drawn in black to give strong definition, dynamic perspectives and solid construction," says **Daniela Flower**, VP of int'l sales at **Ludorum**, the U.K.-based outfit which is producing the toon. "Dennis and Gnasher is a refreshing celebration of childhood, as adults experienced it; boys just being boys, inventing, building and getting up to mischief in a cheeky and charming way!"



ANIMATING LITTLE MISS MAYOR

The world of animation and live-action meet cute in the new Teletoon series **Majority Rules**, produced by **E1's Blueprint Entertainment**. The 26 x 30 series revolves around the adventures of 15-year-old Becky Richards, who is elected the mayor of her small hometown. "The show has wonderful scripts and a fantastic crew," says exec producer **Frank Saperstein**. "But what makes it stand out are the great animated and graphic elements (created by Spin Entertainment using After Effects and Photoshop) that are interwoven throughout each episode as a catchy visual soundtrack." Also on Saperstein's hot MIPTV slate this year are two widely different animated series: *Kid Chimpunk* and *Eric the Tiny*. Catch him while you can!



JUST THE FACTS, KIDS!

Some people may be complaining about their business slowing down, but things are sure hopping at Singapore's **Sparky Animation**. In addition to working on *Veggie Tales: Big River Rescue*, *Zigby*, *Dinosaur Train* and *3-2-1 Penguins*, the studio is preparing a new toon aimed at six to nine-year-olds called



Jack. Co-CEO **Jyotirmoy (Moy) Saha** tells us, "The wonderful thing about the show is that it's a great way to teach kids about interesting facts and concepts, without being 'in your face.' Jack's characters have their own online site that is a user-generated bank of information for kids." Saha became interested in the show because he spent hours on the Internet with his own children, trying to help them find noteworthy facts. "I found out that there was almost no place on the Web where you could get kid-friendly information. When the project was brought to me, I thought this is going to be the perfect way to bring that to young viewers."

FIGHTING EVIL WITH FLAIR

Discriminating toon buyers looking for something with a little extra zest should check out **Portfolio Entertainment's** stylish new show **Hood**, which has been commissioned by Teletoon and Jetix Europe. The series is the brainchild of Canadian animator Howie Shia, who directed the 2006 short film *Flutter*, produced by the National Film Board of Canada. The storylines follow a mysterious team of hoodie-clad super-teens who fight against supernatural threats. "Shia hasn't done a lot of series works, but his artistic style is resonating with a lot of broadcasters who are looking for something with a young and fresh approach," says **Joy Rosen**, Portfolio's co-CEO and co-founder. The Toronto-based shop is also bringing the pilot for *Chinatown Cops*, a late-night series commissioned by Teletoon.



HUMF FINDS A HOME ON NICK JR.

A curious purple furry thing called **Humf** is the star of a new preschool show created by Andrew Brenner (*Angelina Ballerina*, *Maisy*). Based in part on Brenner's experiences raising his own three sons, the show bowed on Nick Jr. in the U.K. last month. The 2D toon is co-produced by **Rubber Duck Entertainment** and **King Rollo Films** and narrated by British comic actress Caroline Quentin. "Right from concept stage, *Humf* looked like something special," says King Rollo Films' managing director **Leo Nielsen**. "The stories are beautifully crafted with an emotional content that I think is very unusual and sets the series apart from other series around at the moment." Purple, cuddly, odd and furry? That's precisely what the world needs right now. ■



Alphanim's 21st Century Game Plan

Heath Kenny, the recently appointed creative director of the French studio, discusses the 2009 slate and plans for increasing the company's global profile.

Last year, French animation studio Alphanim, home of *Galactik Football*, *Robotboy* and *Hairy Scary*, tapped animation veteran Heath Kenny as creative director to act as the link between management and the creative team at the studio. Kenny, who has worked as director on *Robotboy*, has an impressive background as an animator with Expresso and Passion Pictures in the U.K.

Founded in 1997 by CEO Christian Davin, Alphanim (now a Gaumont subsidiary) has a diverse slate of shows in the pipeline. "This year our development slate is focused on action/comedy, adventure and some preschool projects," notes Kenny. "We are also in the process of completing a very exciting project that represents our growth in the production of feature films with the directing talent of Dominique Monfery and artistic vision of Rebecca Dautremer."

With new shows such as *Gawayn*, *Matt's Monsters*, *Pok & Mok* and the recently announced co-pro with Canada's Muse, *Alfred Hedgehog*, Alphanim continues to redefine its brand. "We like to see the Alphanim slate as positive, fun, high-level and creative-driven content," says Kenny. "By allowing the room for people to grow and express themselves artistically, we are rewarded with projects that are engaging and fresh. France has a long established graphic culture and has produced many exceptional talents over the years. Now with the Internet and global media exposure we have young artists arriving with a solid understanding of Anglo-Saxon popular culture. This combined with our established mix of international talent has created a kind of cultural melting pot. This not only allows us to bring something different in what we produce but also in the way we produce shows."

Kenny is happy to see animated projects such as Nick's *The Mighty B!* and Car-

toon Network's *Ben 10* succeed in the marketplace. "I admire *The Mighty B!* for the palpable creative force behind this really positive and funny show, as well as its animation timing, design, music and writing. *Yo Gabba Gabba!* is a real breath of fresh air in the world of preschool animation,

dive into the world of a series is a key ingredient to every really successful show."

Like many creative people working the field today, Kenny says he's thrilled to see the widening definition of an animated series. "The perception has really been blown wide open in the last few years, and as a result, we are finding ourselves in the fantastic position of being able to try things that once would have had no place to air," he offers. "The bar has been raised in terms of the expectation of quality content; the challenge for everyone now is to step up creatively."

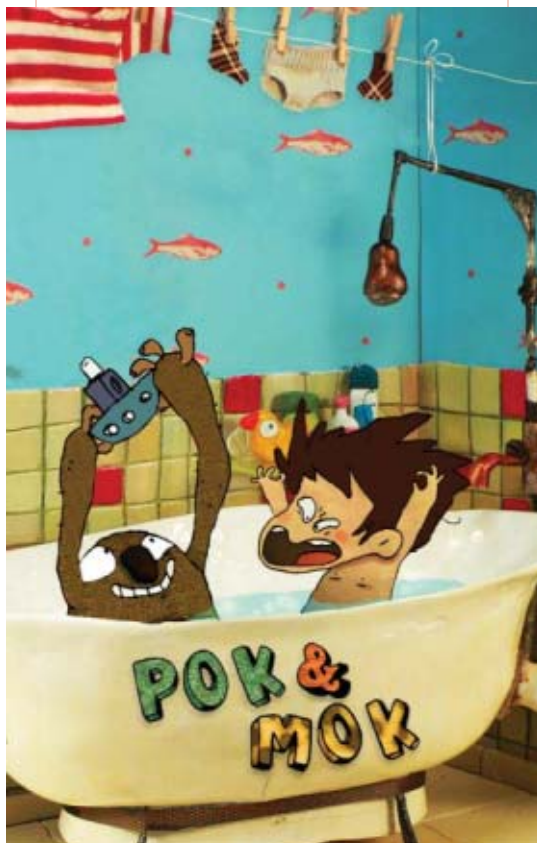
The growth of French animation studios such as Alphanim has gone in hand with the boom in schools such as Gobelins and Supinfocom and events such as Annecy in the country. "I think it is partly a result of a different cultural attitude to the art form of animation and partly due to the fact that there is now a more open forum for different types of animation to be screened," adds Kenny. "Ever since I first came to France, the level of individual artists and their commitment to their art form has amazed me. We have many artists, writers and storyboard artists who continually produce their own projects individually or collectively. This is why it's so very important for us to create an environment of growth and opportunity at Alphanim."

When it comes to staying competitive in this demanding field, Kenny believes that it's not enough to simply provide service work or hope for acquisition-based partnerships. He says the ability to listen to the needs of broadcasters and bring creative solutions will always hold a company in good stead. "Watching animation is certainly no longer limited to television, and it's possible to imagine that 10 years from now television will be just one part of a wider interactive portal for communication and entertainment," he predicts. "The one thing that will remain the same is as long as we continue to produce quality entertainment, there will always be a place for it." ■

For more info about the thriving French
toon shop, visit www.alphanim.com.



Heath Kenny



A Boy and His Gibbon: Alphanim's upcoming new series *Pok & Mok* follows the misadventures of a young boy and his hyper pet gibbon named Pok. The 78 x 7 cartoon delivers a delightfully offbeat take on environmental issues.

while *Ben 10* engages its audience with fantastic simplicity. By creating a central character that really drives the action, it allows every kid with an ounce of imagination to tap their wrist and transport himself or herself into the world of *Ben 10*. Creating this kind of portal through which kids can

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Sit Down, Shut Up, Be Entertained!

Mitch Hurwitz and Josh Weinstein discuss FOX's new primetime toon about a group of teachers who'd rather do anything but teach.

by Mercedes Milligan

Mitch Hurwitz, the quotable creator of dysfunctional TV hit *Arrested Development*, wasn't quite sure what he was getting himself into when he decided to take an Australian sitcom, adapt it for the U.S., then switch it from live-action to animation—but whatever it was, he knew it'd be funny.

Sit Down, Shut Up, which is exec produced by Hurwitz, Josh Weinstein (*Simpsons*, *Futurama*, *Mission Hill*) and Eric and Kim Tannenbaum (*Two and a Half Men*), revolves around a group of ambivalent if not just plain crazy faculty at a small town Florida high school. The ranks of disillusioned school staff are played by a cast that would be enviable in any primetime slot: Jason Bateman, Kristin Chenoweth, Kenan Thompson, Will Forte, Will Arnett, Henry Winkler, Cheri Oteri, Nick Kroll and jack-of-all-voices Tom Kenny give life to characters that range from an embittered librarian to a vice principal who's being secretly medicated by his staff.

The show was conceived when Hurwitz acquired the rights to a short-lived Aussie sitcom of the same name. After writing out a pilot, a series of corporate shufflings put the series on hold. Then, funding producer Sony asked that the show be more "grounded." Hurwitz wasn't keen. "It's this absurd take on an Australian comedy—in the pilot one of the male characters grows breasts! I really didn't want to rewrite it and lose what was funny about it," he explains, "So really to avoid work—which ended up

being a huge irony because I landed myself more difficult work than I've ever experienced—I took it to [entertainment president] Kevin Reilly at FOX and said maybe this will work as an animated show, and I won't have to rewrite it—a character can still grow breasts."

The timing was perfect, as Reilly and his team had just had a brain-storming session about where the next animated hit would come from. "They were saying, 'Isn't there somebody else that can write animation? Isn't there some other voice?'" Hurwitz explains, citing the standard family formula that dominates animated comedies.

Reilly was enthusiastic about the show, but Hurwitz still ended up in rewrites. "We started rewriting it and in a funny way, it wasn't broad enough to be an animated show. That's the

being on a ski trip in the year 2000 and not getting to ski because I was inside writing this script that I'm still working on nine years later. My skiing has gone to hell!"



Mitch Hurwitz

Tooning Up the Teachers' Lounge

SDSU is Hurwitz's first foray into animation—well, with maybe one exception: "The last two years of [*The Golden Girls*], Bea Arthur was really CG. Pixar built the character," the sharp-witted producer jokes, "You can tell like, when she walks, she kind of jumps a little bit, but other than that I think it's pretty solid." Newly inducted into the animation niche, he took the opportunity to make things interesting, if a bit complicated for the tireless artists.

To set the show apart, the 2D characters are placed on live-action backgrounds. "I think we may be the only animated show ever to have a location scout!" says Weinstein, "That's one really funny, weird aspect of the show—we're using state of the art animation, but we still need to send our animators out in cars with cameras to get the backgrounds." Hurwitz takes credit for the idea, but says he was inspired by the photographic backgrounds of Mo Willems' children's books (Willems designed the characters for *SDSU*). "This style sets the characters in the real world, and it sets them in a mundane world," he observes, "It just kind of pops, and it changes the scale of the comedy. You just don't expect in that scenario for a UFO to descend or a cow to start talking."

Weinstein credits the talented crew of Rough Draft Studios, who delivered the animation for *Futurama*, with making the challenging look a reality. "This



Josh Weinstein



other thing I discovered: It's a lot more work, because once I was in the field of animation, I wanted to go much further," he marvels, noting he's only recently completed the pilot. "It's crazy how long animation takes! I remember

was a show that called for a whole new look and approach to doing the animation," he says. "After a few seconds of watching it, it really appears to be one unique world you're looking at."

Of course, the process is not without its hurdles. One of the biggest challenges was photographing all of the locales, from every angle. "We'll [eventually] have a library of all these locations and angles so we can go back to them, but in the beginning, it was a huge amount of work to get all this," Weinstein admits, "And, invariably, every new episode has at last one new location, so there's always a new challenge."

The team also did some tinkering in order to portray the characters in their

vehicles (Winkler's character takes the Driver's Ed car—usually with a student behind the wheel). After toying with high-tech options, the best result came from simply shooting video from a moving car. Weinstein also hints that a future episode features a live-action character interacting with the toons!

Certain background props and set elements are animated, and an exception to the live-action rule was taken with the most important set: the teachers' lounge, which serves as the hub for much of the scholastic drama. The room is constructed in realistic CG to be shoot-able from any angle.

Making the Grade

Despite the steep learning curve,

Hurwitz says he enjoys the freedom animation provides, comparing the comedic shorthand of cartoons to advances in TV production like HD cameras which expedite filming. "On a show like *Arrested*, the whole first half of the show is about bolstering your characters in such a way that they can make plausible decisions to do ridiculous things," he explains. "In animation, you can get to that in the second line of the script." These leaps of logic can be inspiring or discouraging, however: "I think that's why animation writers have had trouble crossing over to live action in many cases, and vice-versa: They're two different ways of thinking."

Without wanting to disparage the work of non-celeb voice actors ("There will never be a better Homer than Dan Castellaneta," Hurwitz insists), he believes that *SDSU*'s known voice cast brings something special to the TV toon landscape. He also cites the large ensemble cast of characters as a stand-apart feature. "There's tons of different relationships you get to explore, there's a ton of variety," he says. "It does follow those animation rules of 'if you don't like that joke, don't worry, there's more coming.' It gives you more places to jump around, more surprising voices."

As for hopes about *SDSU*'s impending debut, the cast and crew are all over the board. Henry Winkler, who plays depressed German teacher Willard Deutschebog, hopes the show will give viewers an escape: "My dream is that, for a lot of people in this moment in time, when this country is going through an amazingly painful period, that we will make them laugh."

Hurwitz, however, is characteristically sardonic: "I am so far from 'Perhaps this will have a positive effect on the future of television.' I'm really like, 'Are they going to show all 13? Please! Please show all 13!'" We're sure viewers will feel the same way! ■

Sit Down, Shut Up premieres April 19 at 8:30 p.m. as part of FOX's Sunday night Animation Domination lineup.

Check out our website for extended interviews with Principal Hurwitz, Mr. Arnett and Professor Winkler.

Roll Call

The *SDSU* crew dishes the schoolyard dirt.



Henry Winkler

"Willard has to take medicine. He has to take a pill to keep his intestines on the inside. He takes a pill so that his toenails do not fuse into a hoof. He's really the poster child for pharmaceuticals. He's just ... he's a lonely man. He's a lonely man who'd rather have a good piece of meat, as opposed to a very voluptuous woman ... But between you and me, he is the sex symbol. It hasn't happened yet—but I know that they're going to put Willard in a Speedo. And when that happens, watch out America."

—Henry Winkler (Willard Deutschebog, German)



Will Arnett

"Ennis is like a super genius in disguise as a really dumb guy. He's a high school teacher who is less concerned with the welfare of his students and more concerned with the state of his own body, and how he's progressing with the ladies. Ladies in general. Really, he doesn't discriminate ... I think that my favorite character is [the vice principal] Stuart, voiced by Will Forte. I'm such a fan of Will Forte, he's such a funny, original guy and he just makes me laugh whatever he does."

—Will Arnett (Ennis Hoffard, English)

"[The characters] are all growing and changing and they all surprise me in different ways. They're not quite like my children, but they're like drawings of my children. I guess I like the rounder ones? Even if I did have a favorite, there's no way I'd say. Do I play any of them? I think that would be my favorite."

—Mitch Hurwitz (who does *not* play any of them, sorry)

"One of my favorite anecdotes from the show involves a guest star ... We got Alanis Morissette! Playing herself! She totally got into playing the villain in our story and was so incredibly good in her role that I'd like to think she'll become the Sideshow Bob of [the show]—coming back once a season to wreak some new form of havoc on the school."

—Josh Weinstein (exec producer)

Tips for Tough Times

Toon execs dole out some solid advice about surviving the global economic slump.



We asked some of the top TV animation execs and producers attending MIPTV about their survival strategies during these hard times. Luckily, they were more than happy to share their wisdom with our readers:

Stephanie Betts, Director of Development and Licensing, Animation, Breakthrough Entertainment: "We're serving Kraft Dinner, for the entire crew! Just kidding. On future projects, we're trying to find solutions to bring



costs down by partnering with other production companies to share in the costs. We've always been involved in co-productions, but they're becoming more and more crucial in order to complete the financing. Finding companies with strong international and creative sensibilities to partner with is key. It will never get easier, it will always be tough, but don't give up! There's nothing else like this industry and we're all lucky to be a part of it. Focus on making great work that's creatively driven and it will happen! Or run the other way, as fast as you can."

Carlos Biern, Head of Co-Pros, BRB Internacional: "It's a difficult time to bring forward new brands as most of the networks are not too open to take risks on new shows. So we are primarily pushing more our well-known brands like *Bernard* or *Angus & Cheryl* in new fields while setting up new ways of financing through



videogames. For indie producers trying to break into the business, I tell them to buy a Wii and an iPhone and use the online

videogame shops for Playstation and the Xbox 360. Don't try to start development of your next show until you spend four weeks understanding these interfaces, designs and storylines."

Raquel Benitez, CEO, Comet Entertainment, Inc.: "You have to control the expenses, reduce costs and be more selective about advertising,



markets to attend, etc. Try to focus on just one property that you really believe in, do not diversify your efforts. Always try to find some time off to walk by the beach!"

Cristina Brandner, Managing Director, Nep-tuno Films: "Build good concepts with good designs and there will be a place for you ... keep kicking!"



Jo Daris, General Manager, Studio100 Animation: "In all honesty we were one of the lucky ones not to be affected so much by this, and the reason is our diversification strategy. Although it is hard to find investment partners in the current climate and although mer-



chandising reve-

nues are under pressure, we found that people are still very much prepared to invest in content through DVD/VOD sales, through live entertainment and through theme parks."

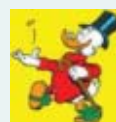
Deborah Forte, President, Scholastic Media: "Even in tough economic times, I remain very optimistic about the short-term (and the long-term) prospects for our business. In keeping with Scholastic's promise to bring high quality entertainment for children and parents, the value served with consistently promising educational content will last through the ups and downs of the economy. We will continue to work closely with our development team to make sure the Scholastic product offers value through long lasting, dependable educational entertainment."



Gregory Payne, Chairman, Foothill Entertainment: "My biggest suggestion is to conserve cash and cut costs."

Sjoerd Raemakers, Director of Commercial Affairs, Telescreen:

"Find decent partners, do not overspend and as a company do not take too many big risks. Every project should be a valuable addition and should have a positive influence on the company's performance as such, but not key to the existence of the company. Work with people and organizations that are established. Think in the same line and do not try to invent the wheel again. Be willing to share. And don't trust anyone who tells you that he/she is the best."



continued on page 44

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Joy Rosen, Co-Founder and President, Portfolio Entertainment:

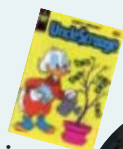
"Broadcasters are more conservative and reluctant to make commitments. They still want to refresh their schedules, but they want a bigger bang for their bucks. So we have to be more adaptable. They are also asking for big name brands that will have an established audience, or they ask for something that's totally off-the wall. But nice, middle of the road doesn't work."

Jyotirmoy Saha, Co-CEO, Sparky Animation:

"Regardless of the climate, there will never be a substitute for the freshest ideas. We are looking out for good projects even more aggressively. Even at the cost of indefinitely deferring our personal up-sides, we are taking bolder steps towards growing our business and investing in better shows. Our thinking is that this financial climate will probably last for about two years or a bit more. If we are careful and judicious about our investments now, when all of this comes back to normal again, we'll emerge as an animation business that is much stronger than many of our bigger counterparts today. My advice to newcomers to the field: Don't sell the shirt off your back just to get involved with a co-production partner. Your money is just as important as anybody else's. If the commercial deal is not equitable, then you need a new partner."

Frank Saperstein, SVP, Animation and Children's Programming, E1 Entertainment:

"Play your cards close to the vest, be cautious about how you spend your money, and make sure you do a killer job on the



orders you do have because that is how you will be judged! Tips for indie animators: I know it's tough out there, but it's also a good time to mine your own ideas and make opportunities for yourself. Diversity is always key, because there are so many different areas animation can be used."

Adam Shaheen, President/Executive Producer, Cuppa Coffee Studios:

"We find that doing good work with sound budgets helps us flourish, not just 'survive.' Think about the work and the idea first, not your checking account."



Rita Street, President, Radar Cartoons:

"Here are my tips: Downsizing where possible, taking advantage of Skype and eliminating travel! You can keep business going by spending more money on lunches and dinners and upping the networking quota by half. I also suggest using LinkedIn! It works. And, although I can't stand the idea of Facebook, I'm gonna have to jump on its free marketing. Constant Contact is also a wonderful, cheap way to send out pro newsletters on your company, as well as sales offers. Stick to your mission statement—the one thing you really do best and sell the hell out of it—in an original, fun way. At MIPTV, make sure you see



the web aggregators like Joost. Partner with your competitors. Talk to everyone and stay upbeat. No one wants to buy from a producer who's under the table at La Chunga, crying in her Mojito ... (unless, of course, you're buying!)"



Muriel Thomas, Head of Sales and Co-Pros, E1 Kids:

"The current financial situation will certainly have an impact, but we are strongly positive about [animated] shows. We believe that they will continue to travel well and their high quality will stand out. I think producers should try and keep projects as close as possible to their original concepts as it's impossible to please everyone..."

Caterina Vacchi, Senior Manager/Executive Producer, Atlanticyca Entertainment:

"Really great properties and really strong concepts always survive in different financial environments. This is a motivating time for all of us; a time to get back to basics, a time to pursue and develop new potential partnerships, to deliver on quality and content. Maintain perseverance and seek nothing but top quality. Consistently do your best."



Joseph Walker, Co-Founder/Associate Producer, Lincoln Butterfield:

"We try to keep our operating overhead as low as possible. This has been our strategy since we founded the business. Low overhead provides us with a flexibility which will allow us to explore creative and adaptive financing techniques. If there is any doubt you need it, there is no doubt ... you don't need it!" ■



To read more about these animation industry players and their new projects, visit Animag's MIPTV showcase online at www.animationmagazine.net.

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A Graphic Take on Tweens

The creators of CarpeDiem and TV-Loonland's *My Life Me* take a break from their busy schedules to tell us about their great-looking new project. **by Ramin Zahed**

Four excitable tweens try to make sense of the joys and anxieties of life in the hip, new 52 x 11 animated series *My Life Me*, co-produced by TV-Loonland and Canadian studio CarpeDiem Film & TV. The of-the-moment show is co-created by JC Little, Cindy Filipenko and rising manga star Svetlana Chmakova, who created the popular TOKYOPOP comic *Dramacon*.

Little says she was inspired to create the show by her daughter's daily misadventures at school. "Early teens tend to wear their emotions in strong colors ... and black and white," she notes. "Putting a lock on four really different personalities, by forcing them to work together in a 'pod,' was bound to produce some great sparks. Making each of the kids intensely mercurial accelerates the fun!"

Little, who is also directing the project, recruited her friends, writer Filipenko and artist Chmakova, to bring her concept to life with the aid of development and production house CarpeDiem. "They really pulled it together beautifully through development and production," she adds.

According to Chmakova, *My Life Me* is vaguely similar to her previous manga as they both center on kids with conflicting personalities who are interested in comics. "The major differences I see are in the setting, the age of both the characters and the intended audience, and also the genre—*My Life Me* is a lighthearted episodic comedy, while *Dramacon* is a romantic drama with comedy elements."

High on the list of Little's priorities was keeping the warmth of the 2D traditional look, while taking advantage of the possibilities of the digital pipeline. "The animation is an interesting hybrid," she adds. "We're really trying to push the boundaries of cut-out digital animation. We've been really careful in the construction of the characters, as the human form can be quite unforgiving in the cut-out technique."

Little mentions that the show's animators still do quite a bit of drawing to help the fluidity along. "Preserving the hand-drawn line quality was a big factor, too; vector perfection in line quality is easy to get lost in, and the perfectly smooth line was something we actively

avoided. The backgrounds are created in 3D with special programming to keep our art direction within the 'print' world. Our talented team succeeded in creating a completely 2D environment in 3D, which has obvious production advantages."

Dealing honestly with the challenges of being a teenager was another major goal. "Cindy and I wanted to make TV shows that resonate with real people. I spent years producing literally hundreds of TV commercials mainly selling sugar," she adds. "A lot of great animation has been made in the name of sugar. But I got tired of it. I wouldn't want to create something that wasn't meaningful, and I know a lot of animators who feel the same way."

Little is also proud of the special manga-infused look of the show. "One of the show's big selling points is its unique look—the strong color with black & white panels, the manga devices and screen tones, the brazen baring of over-the-top emotions. The design asserts itself as *animated print manga*, rather than anime."

Both Little and Chmakova express their enthusiasm about the thriving global animation scene. "These days, you can do so much from the comfort of the home studio," says Little. "If you can stand working with children underfoot—so many artists have been set free by the home set-up, myself included. But working in a big studio environment is also important, and being able to work as a team player matters whether you're in-house or in-home!"

Now that they've seen their tweens come to animated life, the creators of *My Life Me* are quite positive about the possibilities of the medium. "If you want to get into comics, I would suggest starting a web-comic and researching ways to promote it to your potential audience," says Chmakova. "If things go really well, you might not even need a publisher—I have heard of people who are making a living off their web-comics just on their own." Meanwhile, Little has six simple words to guide you along the way: "Stop dithering and go for it!" ■

For more info, visit www.loonland.com.

Fresh Breeze from the East

CHINAnimax reveals ZN Animation's eclectic new projects for 2009.

Although the mainstream media continues to report on the troubling state of the global economy, we like to hear positive stories about the animation sector from around the world. One example is Singapore-based CHINAnimax, which is the worldwide distributor of Zhongnan Animation Int'l (the sole agent of Zhejiang Zhongnan Group Animation Video Co., also known as ZN Animation). ZN Animation is one of China's biggest companies and has production studios in Hangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing and a library of over 10,000 minutes of 2D and CG animation. This toon powerhouse is moving forward with an active slate of exciting new projects.

"2009 is shaping up to be another exciting year for us," says ZN Animation chairman Jianrong Wu. "In our production pipeline, we will be completing three CG-animated series: *The Configurators* (26 x 22), *RUBI* (52 x 6) and *Dream Town* (104 x 12). We're also embarking on three new animated series (*China Panda*, *Magic Eye Adventures* and the second season of *RUBI*).

We are setting a new corporate milestone by producing animated features, some of which will showcase new immersive stereo 3-D technologies."

Wu tells us that ZN Animation would like to present more and better productions to entertain viewers and to spread joy and harmony worldwide. "We're proud to be one of the biggest animation studios in China," he

says, "We aim to entertain global audiences, thereby creating a greater awareness and appreciation of Chinese animation." Another top goal is to become a big player in the world of stereo 3-D filmmaking. "We already have the technology and would like



Triple Treat: Among the new animated series produced by China's ZN Animation are the CG-animated preschool shows *Dream Town* and *RUBI*, and the action-packed older-skewing *The Configurators*, about two boys who discover an alien jellyfish egg!



to be one of the region's first pioneers. Of course, we hope to continue to expand our business worldwide in all areas including licensing & merchandising and publishing comics and DVDs. We are open to developing strategic partnerships to explore the full potential of our skills and resources to get mutually beneficial results."

The animation division of China's national

broadcaster CCTV is one of the company's co-producers. CCTV's children's channel has had a great response to the studio's *Super Buffalo* and *Zheng He's Voyages to the West Seas*. The shows have also generated a lot of demand on VOD Internet platforms in the country.



Jianrong Wu

Western animation professionals who would like to partner with the company would be happy to know that ZN's projects are all self-funded, but they'll consider co-producing if the terms are suitable. According to Wu, the production costs depend on the uniqueness of the project, the techniques and the length of each show—ranging anywhere between \$2,000 and \$7,000 per minute.

"We always place the quality of the animation as our top priority in our consideration of the cost of production," he adds. "The Chinese government has made policies to support the animation industry by rewarding producers for high-quality animation (with the potential to win awards) and helping to promote them, but they seldom give direct funding to the production cost." He also points out that the government supports animation of which the rights are mainly owned by the country. The content of the programs need to be suitable for children, and the shows need to promote positive values while educating and entertaining audiences.

Wu remains optimistic about the future of Chinese animation, despite all the economic challenges faced by many around the world. "We believe that the current global economic crisis will have temporary and limited effects on the animation industry," he says. "Twentieth-century history has shown that during the Great Depression, Disney and other animation studios progressed significantly and in the 1970s, after the downturn, the Japanese anime industry powered ahead. In this crisis, we seize the opportunity to develop better and more quality animation, to co-produce with major players and to do more business in the international market. We would like to think that our programs offer buyers great value for the money." ■

Visit ZN Animation at MIPTV booth 05.08, or online at www.chinanimax.com & www.znanimation.com.

The Padded Cel

by Robby London



Down and Out at MIPTV/On the Riviera

Necessity is the mother of invention, and nowhere is this more evident than in the world of showbiz trend-setting. The economic meltdown has pushed Hollywood "haute couture" over a cliff—where it is falling so fast it just passed the Dow. Frugality is becoming "in." Coupons are the new Kruggerands, Costco the new Neiman Marcus and Tiffany now specializes in house-arrest ankle bracelets. CEO now stands for Crooked Entitled Oblivious. Richie Rich proudly drives a beat-up Kia bearing the vanity plate "RICHE2RAGS." The new ethos is ... if you don't have it, flaunt it!

Look for a major battle front in the Frugality Revolution on the streets of Cannes this month. That's where TV buyers, sellers, producers—plus wannabes, wouldabeens and should-never-have-trieds—gather for the mother of all reality shows: The program market known as MIPTV. MIP has always epitomized glamorous excess in our business.

Although recent years have seen a steady decline in the scope of the parties, the value of the swag and the size of the kickback offers, we suspect that the vibe at this MIP will truly constitute a sea change. The New Frugality flies in the face of everything that MIP once represented. Nowhere is there more pressure to appear flush with cash—and in no year has more cash already been flushed.

Your first indication that things have changed will be when you take that jet-lagged first-evening stroll down the Croisette—and the local beggars give spare change to you. And why do some of them look so familiar? Wasn't that the guy from Nickelodeon you pitched at MIPCOM? Here are a few other changes we'd expect to see:

Lodgings: While there will be an equivalent number of attendees rolling their luggage through the front door of the exorbitant status-symbol Majestic Hotel—most of them will sneak through the lobby, skulk out the back door and into the one-star Hotel Darfur—where they are sharing a room with eight colleagues using innovative sleeping configurations perfected in the

are getting for their shows.

Promotion: Typically there are huge, glitzy billboards promoting various shows posted everywhere along the Croisette. This year, frugal sellers will be promoting their wares the old fashioned way—by hand—on the walls of bathroom stalls. (This is exciting news for many *Animation Magazine* readers: If this

trend continues, it may become cost-effective to send artists to MIP!) Meanwhile, last year's posters remain on the billboards—hypeing "new hit" shows which already flopped. *Knight Rider* anyone? And speaking of cars...

Transportation: Many will be foregoing taxis in favor of a massive new fleet of dirt cheap, hand-pulled rickshaws—direct result of the French government's own economic stimulus package. Hot tip: Our Padded Cel Rickshaw is one of the few with padded seats. But I don't do hills.

Media Coverage: Fewer publications can afford to send correspondents to Cannes. Look for an increase in "virtual coverage." Unethical journalists will stay home and rely upon a combination of Google Earth, CroisetteCam and tarot cards as their sources to imply they are right there on the spot covering the market! (Note: The Padded Cel condemns deceptive practices and non-disclosure regarding breaches of journalistic ethics and betrayals of public trust.) (We stand proudly behind our unblemished record of fully-disclosed fraud, breach and betrayal.) ■

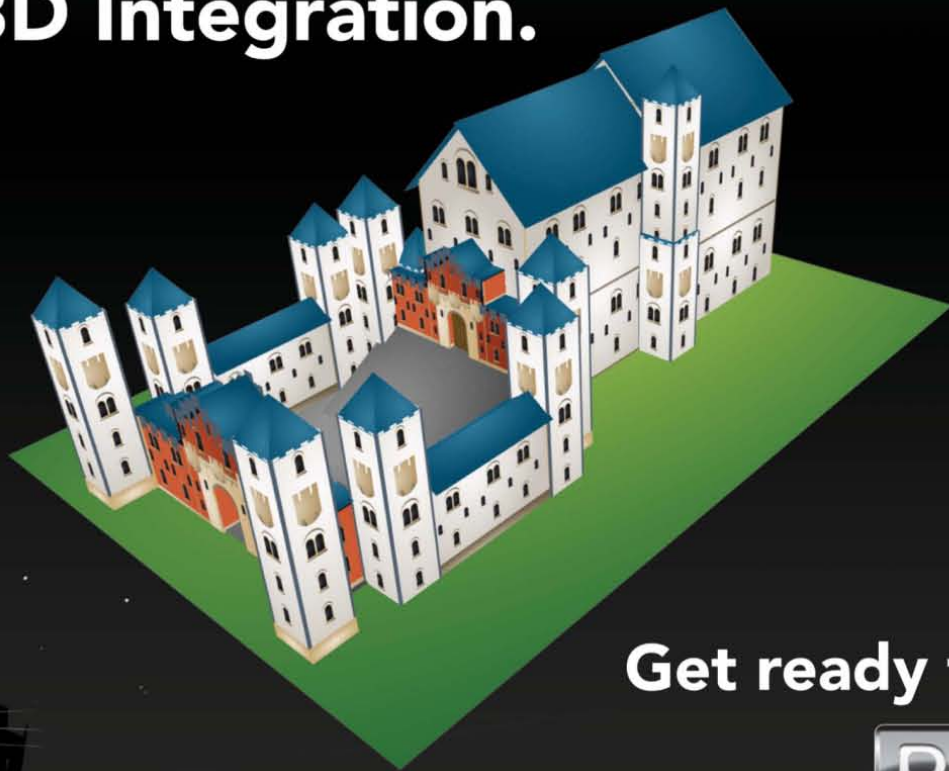
Veteran TV exec Robby London will be sharing a room with Bernie Madoff at the Carlton Hotel's newly renovated Cinar suite during the MIPTV market.



Mumbai slums. Here's a hot tip: Savvy sellers should finagle a way to share lodging with buyers—in the Tent City being set up on the Croisette.

Meals a la Cart: Several large studios are reportedly seeking alternatives to their execs eating in outrageously expensive Cannes restaurants. One company is rumored to have negotiated a bulk purchase of surplus airline meals—which have been languishing in frozen storage since the airlines stopped serving them—and will set up a serving cart in a local park for its staff. Not to worry: the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches were prepared long before the salmonella outbreak. If a seller experiences debilitating waves of nausea, it can be attributed solely to the prices they

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Jurassic Choo Choo

Creator Craig Bartlett talks about his new animated creation *Dinosaur Train*, a Jim Henson Company project which is scheduled to pull into PBS KIDS this fall.

by Ramin Zahed

It's always great news when a new show by an animation veteran gets the greenlight. That's why fans of *Hey*

Arnold! had a big smile on their faces when they heard that Craig Bartlett, the talented creator of the popular 1990s toon, has a new CG-animated series in the works. The fact that the show is a joint venture with PBS and the Jim Henson Company was the icing on the cake.

The Seattle-born artist, who is married to Lisa Groening (that's *Simpsons* creator Matt's sister!) tells us that he first thought about the idea behind the show when his son Matt was four. "You can say the idea has had a long germination process. We used to take my son to this Travel Town [a miniature railroad ride in L.A.'s Griffith Park] and he just loved it. He was all about Thomas the Tank Engine and the Brio train tracks and he had this bucket of toy dinosaurs that he loved to play with. I thought, man if we had a show which put dinosaurs on trains, four-year-old boys would really flip for it."

These days, Bartlett's son is in his second year of college—which says a lot about TV animation's development process—but the show has finally become a reality. Bartlett says he first chatted about doing a dino-themed preschool show with Linda Simensky a decade ago, who

was the development exec at Cartoon Network at the time. She kept in touch with Bartlett after she left Cartoon Net-



work for her new post as senior programming director at PBS KIDS. "Linda called me up a year after she got the new job and said, 'I'm ready for your show now,'" recalls the animator, who has worked on numerous shows including *Rugrats* and

age T-Rex, who is adopted by a family of Pteranodons. Together, they get on a special time-traveling Dinosaur Train, where they learn about all kinds of dinosaurs and their habitats in differ-

ent eras. As exec producer Lisa Henson explains, "Based on input from paleontologists, science educators and early childhood education experts, the show has developed an ambitious and creative curriculum that harnesses children's enthusiasm and curiosity about dinosaurs, sparking their interest in life science and natural history."

Bartlett says he welcomed the opportunity to work on a show that is CG-animated. "It's different from *Sid the Science Kid*, because we're not doing motion capture," he notes.

"The animation is done by Singapore's BIG Communications (with participation and assistance of the Media Development Authority of Singapore). It's just wonderful to see how our sketches and drawings are translated into CG. Plus, it



Craig Bartlett

"I thought, man if we had a show which put dinosaurs on trains, four-year-old boys would really flip for it."

—Dinosaur Train creator, Craig Bartlett

Ren & Stimpy, as well as recent Henson projects such as *Unstable Fables: 3 Pigs and a Baby*, *The Skrumps* and *Sid the Science Kid*.

The 40 x half-hour toon, which is also offered as an 80 x 11-minute show, is told through the eyes of Buddy, a preschool-

would have been murder to do all the trains in 2D!"

Praising the show's top-notch team, which includes producer Sue Bea Montgomery, story editor Joe Purdy, art director and CG supervisor Terry Izumi, songwriter/composer Mike Himelstein, story-



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board director Karl Toerge and production manager Travis Gates, Bartlett says he couldn't have been happier about the way the show looks and sounds.

"One thing you'll notice is that although our kid dinosaurs are pretty adorable—they are about two-heads tall and have these big eyes—the older dinosaurs are depicted quite realistically," adds Bartlett. "Four-year-olds want their dinosaurs anatomically correct. They'd be busting us if they didn't look real. The wow factor about dinosaurs is that they were these monsters that roamed the earth. I think that's empowering for kids,

to play with toy dinosaurs—because they have these huge, powerful things under their control."

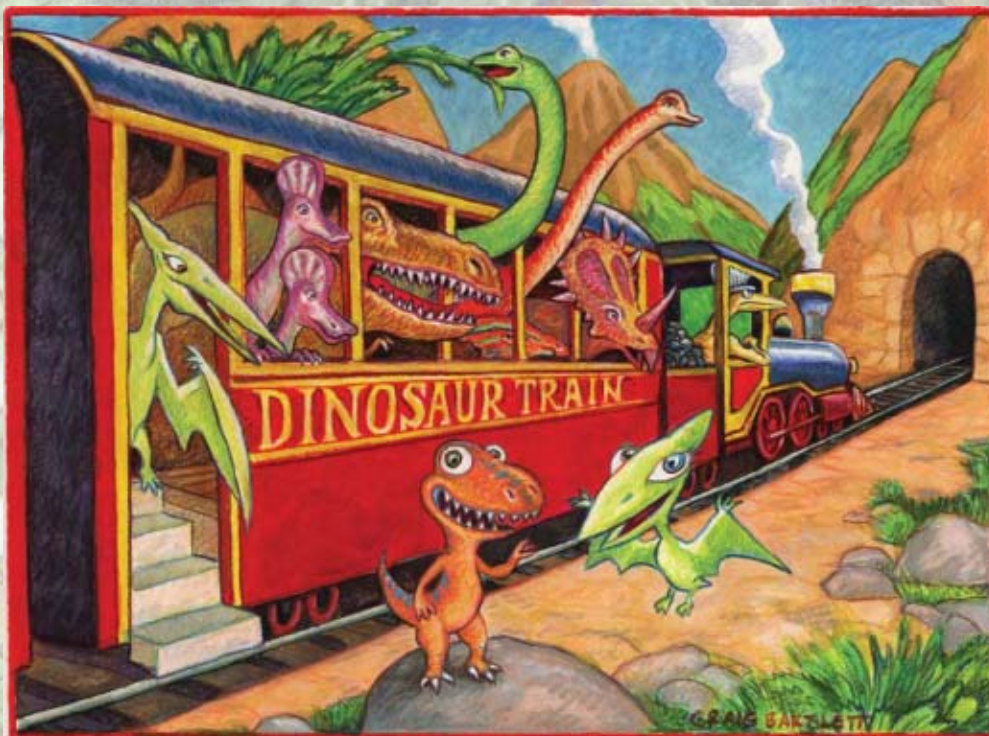
Since Bartlett has been involved in so many influential shows in his career, he can also give you a wealth of advice about the evolving nature of the TV animation business. One thing he'll tell you is that these days toon producers have a lot less money to play with, and have to deliver the goods in a ridiculously short amount of time. "I definitely feel that the business has changed a lot," he shares. "Back in the '90s, when we were making *Rugrats* and *Hey Arnold!*, we had no idea

how much time and money we had. Just to give you an idea, we will be delivering 80 11-minute episodes of our show by the end of summer and I'm 25 shows into it right now. We're blazing, man! We used to do the audio (AMRs) in a week back then. Now we do them in a day and they get the storyboards done within hours."

Of course, working in this fast-paced environment has its unexpected advantages. "Joe Purdy and I are writing so fast that we get into this trance," says Bartlett. "I have recorded 25 episodes with the talented kids who do the voices of the dinosaur family. I can hear their voices in my head as I write. We were on such a roll last month, we did eight episodes in one week. A side advantage is that when you're working with child actors, it's great to capture their voices all in a short period of time. When I was doing *Hey Arnold!*, I went through five Arnolds, from the pilot to the movie. It's a heartbreak when their voices change!"

More than anything, Bartlett says it's been a blast to create this beautiful show with a fantastic cast and crew. "I'm meeting some great new people—I realize that it's such a great opportunity to be able to do this show. I've done several projects with the Hensons and it's been a great partnership. Plus, we get to do this in this historic Henson studio, which is kind of an oasis here in the middle of Hollywood. And they feed us a lot of pies!" ■

The Henson Company will bring *Dinosaur Train* to the MIPTV market this month. The show will premiere on PBS KIDS in the fall.



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Tools and Top Picks of the Trade

Though they rarely step out to share the spotlight with their animated creations or explosion-infused blockbuster projects, without the long hours, talent and tech-savvy of effects artists and animators, the entertainment industry would be a much duller landscape. We caught up with some unsung heroes from Digital Domain, DreamWorks Animation, Imagi Studios, Sony Pictures Imageworks and WETA Digital to find out what they're up to, how they got there and what makes them tick.



David Burgess

Most recently crafted the moves for a blob, giant insect and missing link as head of character animation for DreamWorks Animation's *Monsters vs. Aliens*. He also served the studio as supervising animator for comic-strip adaptation *Over the Hedge*.

Favorite software: iTunes, EMO (DreamWorks Animation's in-house animation software), Sound Studio, iMovie

Favorite animated character: Of all time: Homer Simpson; of characters I've worked on: Hammy from *Over The Hedge* and Genie from *Aladdin*.

Most anticipated film of 2009: Would have to say *Coraline* (I'm a huge Neil Gaiman fan) and *Monsters vs. Aliens*.

Never leave home without: My green Buck Metro pocket knife.

Geekiest possession: I'm a music geek, and my wackiest recent purchase is probably the Wadia 170i iPod Transport/Dock.

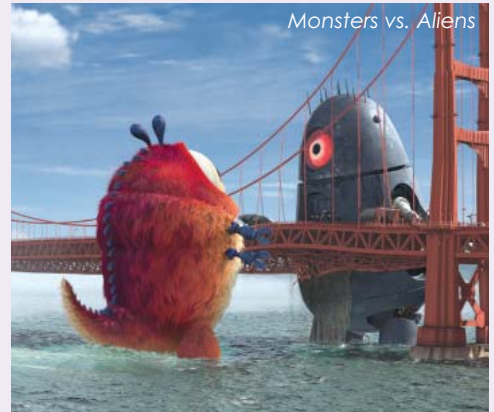
Industry pet peeve: That getting the story right in an animated feature is ... so ... dang ... hard!

Website addiction: allmusic.com, craigslist.org, amazon.com, secondspin.com

Advice for job seekers: For feature animation, we love to see the characters on your demo reel thinking, and moving with a good range of styles—from Tex Avery (broad) to Ingmar Bergman (subtle).



Homer Simpson



Monsters vs. Aliens



Yan Chen

Imagi Studios' vfx supervisor for the long-awaited *Astro Boy* CG feature. He also served as head of production technology on the Christopher Reeve project *Everyone's Hero*.

Favorite software: Photoshop... only in PS can you do the same thing 5,000 different ways.

Favorite animated character: Changes on a constant basis, but currently is Priss Asagiri (*Bubblegum Crisis*)

Most anticipated film of 2009: *Goemon* (by Kazuaki Kiriya, director of *Casshern*)

Never leave home without: My Archos 7

Geekiest possession: Thousands of *Magic* cards

Industry pet peeve: People who don't have a passion for filmmaking, but still make films for a living.

Blog addiction: www.engadget.com

Advice for job seekers: FORGET about learning the software or the tools, that's useless. Develop your talent by concentrating on fundamentals, either artistic or technical.



Goemon



Priss Asagiri



Jakob H. Jensen

Animation director for *Astro Boy* at Imagi. In a past life he served as supervising animator at DreamWorks, working on films like the rat-friendly



Astro Boy

feature *Flushed Away*.

Favorite software: Staedtler Mars Lumograph 2B Pencil. Never crashes!!

Favorite animated character: Shere Khan! No, Medusa! No, Madam Mim! Oh, you get the point.

Most anticipated film of 2009: *Up* (and *Astro Boy*, of course!)

Never leave home without: My rocket boots...

Geekiest hobby/possession: Probably my *Secret of NIMH* cels.

Industry pet peeve: People who render themselves ecstatic by repeating good old lessons like "What is the character thinking?" as if it was some kind of revelation. It's embarrassing!

Blog addiction: onegoodmove.org

Advice for job seekers: If you want it bad enough you won't need my advice. Put this magazine down and start working on that reel!



Shere Khan



Tom Gibbons

Berkeley, Calif.-based Tippett Studio's animation supervisor. His skills have been put to work on live-action/animation hybrid *Enchanted*, J.J. Abram's *Cloverfield* and the upcoming Sam Raimi horror flick *Drag Me to Hell* (May 29).



Mighty Joe Young

Favorite software: All equally loved and despised.

Favorite animated character: Mighty Joe Young (1949) and Vermithrax (dragon in 1981's *Dragonslayer*)

Most anticipated film/TV show of 2009: *Coraline* and *Breaking Bad*

Never leave home without: My journal

Geekiest hobby: Assembling dead animals

Industry pet peeve: Obsession with details, lack of attention to the big picture.

Blog addiction: I don't "surf" but I maintain a blog of my artwork:

<http://gibbysdowntime.blogspot.com>

Advice for job seekers: Only show the good stuff—experience does not presuppose talent, so only show stuff that is applicable to the job. Don't give up.



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Andy Jones

Animation director at New Zealand-based WETA Digital. Andy is hard at work as animation supervisor on WETA's latest project, *Avatar*. He's also served as supe for *Superman Returns* and *I, Robot*, and directed the "Final Flight of the Osiris" chapter for *The Animatrix*.

Favorite software: Maya

Favorite animated character: WALL•E (3D), Tarzan (2D)

Most anticipated film/TV show/videogame of

2009: *Avatar* / *Flight of the Conchords* / *Guitar Hero*

Never leave home without: A hug and kiss from my daughter, Lani.

Geekiest possession: A *Final Fantasy* motion-capture prop gun

Industry pet peeve: Long hours

Website addiction: YouTube

Advice for job seekers: Always start and end your reel with your best work.



WALL•E



Guitar Hero



Pete Nash

Sony Pictures Imageworks' senior animation supervisor for the upcoming kids book adaptation about a flood of food, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. He previously supervised animation for the studio's *Surfs Up* and was an animator at Pixar on *A Bug's Life*, *Toy Story 2*, *Finding Nemo* and *Monsters, Inc.*

Favorite software: Neck beard stimulation tool (NBST)

Favorite animated character: SpongeBob

Most anticipated film of 2009: *Barbie: A Mermaid's Tale*

Never leave home without: Pants

Geekiest hobby/possession: Nintendo 64's *GoldenEye*—even though it's not mine.

Industry pet peeve: Not enough movies about monkeys in space.

Website addiction: Facebook

Advice for job seekers: Please don't put music tracks over your reels. Movies spend a fortune on scores and sound design and I really need to hear the dialogue!



SpongeBob
SquarePants



GoldenEye 007



Troy Saliba

Animation director at Sony Pictures Imageworks; most recently acted as animation supervisor for SPI's work on Disney's latest talking animal flick, *G-Force*. He also suped for *Monster House* and *Haunted Mansion*, and was a senior animator on *Spider-Man 2* and *Stuart Little 2*.

Favorite software: Maya, Photoshop, FinalCut Pro

Favorite animated character: 2D: King Louie from *The Jungle Book*; 3D: Edna Mode from *The Incredibles*

Most anticipated film of 2009: *G-Force*, of course! No, I'd have to say *Up* from Pixar. Not a very edgy answer,

but I'm very interested to see how they play out that story.

Never leave home without: Swiss Army knife, laser pointer, phone and a cup of coffee.

Geekiest hobby/possession: I made a tiny replica of the TARDIS from *Dr. Who*, for my son, with working lights and all. If anyone knows what that is, they are guilty of a certain amount of geekiness as well.

Industry pet peeve: Too much emphasis on software in animation schools, not enough on acting and film principals.

Website addiction: Shopping for parts online for my 1970 Mini Cooper.

Advice for job seekers: Objectivity is the most difficult aspect of making it as an animator. Learn to observe your work through fresh eyes, and honestly appraise it. Take creative critiques and learn from them.



Up



Edna Mode

"It automates my workflow"

Josh Darling

"It saved me hours of backtracking"

Ed Lude

Watch Your Assets...

"No more renaming files."

"Brilliant"



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In a perfect world, no one should ever have to stop to think about asset management...It should just be automatic and not require special skills. For years artists have been forced to use complicated hand-me-down programmer-centric tools. Why can't there be a simple and easy way for artists to enjoy good asset management without all of the hassle?

There are plenty of middleware companies out there but not many dedicated to improving an artist's workflow. Mogware is one company that stands out from the rest because of their never ending quest to simplify and automate the asset management experience. Mogware has a comprehensive suite of products, dedicated to reducing the technical requirements of content preparation so

that many of the repetitive tasks following data export can be automated and reduced to a single action.

With products like 'Mog Complete', FileHamster and MogBox, artists can remain in their creative flow without the headaches associated with manual asset management tools.

www.mogware.com





Matthias Wittmann

Lead digital artist for animation at prolific vfx house Digital Domain. He recently wrapped the reverse-aging epic *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, acting as animation lead for the pic. Previously he was Digital Domain's animation lead on *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*.

Favorite software: Maya



*Call of Duty:
World at War*

Favorite animated character: Full CG/cartoon movies: WALL•E. I'm a big fan of subtleties. In cartoony movies this is often limited to some eye twitches when a character gets nervous. WALL•E didn't even have eyelids and still acted more subtle than most CG-characters in recent movies. The pigeons' performance in *Bolt* was a great idea and very well executed (proving that overacting can be cool sometimes).

Live-action movies: *Benjamin Button*. That show was an avalanche of subtleties. You never get the entire performance automatically. Without animators working on every shot to make sure the performance came through, there wouldn't have been a living Benjamin.

Most anticipated film/TV show/videogame of 2009: Film: *Avatar*; TV show: *Rescue Me*; Videogame: Still too wrapped up in *Call of Duty: World at War* to think about the next game.

Never leave home without: My iPhone and enough money for a latte.

Geekiest hobby/possession: Having an iPhone is geeky, but coding for it is *really* geeky.

Industry pet peeve: Overacting CG characters and senseless overcrowding. Crowd simulation software like Massive is fantastic, but a crowd is only thrilling up to a certain size. Beyond that we don't care anymore.

Website addiction: www.urbandictionary.com—As a German living in the U.S., it's really useful.

Advice for job seekers: First think about what you really want to do, then focus on that. Don't choose a paycheck over a task that brings you closer to your goal, otherwise you might waste a lot of time. Be very critical with your own work, but also consider the opinions of others. You are the artist and you decide what you think is good or not, but the audience either likes or dislikes it in the end! Never stop learning. If you don't have the urge to learn something new every day, don't start with this job.

[compiled by Mercedes Milligan]

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Real Dilemmas in a Surreal World

John DesJardin talks about how he handled the super challenging task of recreating the graphic-novel universe of Alan Moore's *Watchmen* for director Zack Snyder.

by Ron Magid

Adapting one of the first, and arguably most important, graphic novels to film is a daunting task, no matter how you look at it. Despite his previous success bringing Frank Miller's *300* to the screen, director Zack Snyder found that Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, illustrated by Dave Gibbons, was a very different animal.

"*Sin City* and *300* had very strong graphics, something to latch onto and try to duplicate visually," says overall visual effects supervisor John "DJ" DesJardin (*The Matrix* sequels, *Fantastic Four*, *X-Men 3*), "but *Watchmen*'s style is linked more to how the story is told—there isn't as extreme a color palette or a look to duplicate."

And with 1,100 shots mixing superhero fantasy with real-life events and environs, ranging from digital environments and characters to miniature fire and water gags, the job was particularly demanding for the effects houses involved, which included Sony Pictures Imageworks, MPC, Frantic Films, Intelligent Creatures and CIS.

One of the project's tougher assignments was animating the Owl Ship rescuing people from a raging tenement fire and crashing into an ice shelf in Antarcti-

ca. "MPC did a fantastic job creating this really nice movement, a little bit helicopter, a little bit Millennium Falcon," DesJardin says. "I'm glad we ended up doing these interactive environment scenes with a CG Owl Ship rather than trying to craft it as some huge miniature. We got really specific with the choreography and that's a feather in MPC's cap; they did a great job of integrating lots of CG water, snow and breaking stuff."

One of *Watchmen*'s cooler characters is the enigmatic Rorschach, whose muslin visage features ever-changing inkblots. Frantic Films did the original movement tests and helped determine how to shoot

"*Sin City* and *300* had very strong graphics, something to latch onto and try to duplicate visually, but *Watchmen*'s style is linked more to how the story is told—there isn't as extreme a color palette or a look to duplicate."

—*Watchmen* vfx supervisor John "DJ" DesJardin





Heroic Efforts: Two of the biggest challenges facing the *Watchmen* vfx team were creating the constantly moving inkblots on Rorschach's face and Dr. Manhattan's problematic size and shimmering blue body.

the ink-blotted one, portrayed by Jackie Earle Haley, wearing a prosthetic makeup to create the proper contour of Rorschach's head beneath a stretchy mask with a coarse texture and numerous tracking markers painted onto it. "The mask, developed by costume designer Michael Wilkinson, didn't cover Jackie's entire face—his eyes were visible because we wanted to translate his emotions into the CG animation, which was handled by Lon Molnar's team at Intelligent Creatures, who would then paint out Jackie's eyes."

But it was the blots that worried DesJardin: "That could've been extremely iterative, and I didn't want to get locked into a complex procedure. Zack wanted a slow boil with an occasional surge timed to dialogue or action. Intelligent Creatures' animators knew the target shapes to hit, but not necessarily the exact timing, so they animated hundreds of frames of blots in Maya which could then be sped up or slowed down, and if they had to re-animate them completely, all the roto would stay intact and they could turn it around within a day, even if the shot

had already been finalized."

DesJardin points out one of the movie's more unpredictable problems: "We couldn't use the actual Rorschach blots, they're apparently copyrighted, so we had to make our own. The art department came up with about 10 to 15 Zack Snyder-approved fake Rorschach blots."

Supersizing Billy

But the biggest challenge—and the first thing Snyder and DesJardin talked



about—was the oversized and very blue Dr. Manhattan. "How do you get a guy who's yoked beyond normal human believability and is also a good actor and doesn't mind being painted blue?" DesJardin wondered. "Almost immediately, Zack and I discussed making Manhattan a CG character. We could get the look we wanted and have a really good actor drive the performance."

That actor was Billy Crudup, who wore a suit and skullcap covered in blue LEDs and didn't mind being completely replaced by his digital alter ego. There were some scale issues, since Manhattan towers at 6'2", while Crudup is 5'7". DesJardin's solution: "We made sure Billy's eyes were positioned where Manhattan's eyes really would be. Sometimes we'd put him on an apple box when his feet were out of frame so he'd be the right height. Then we'd do another pass of him standing on the ground wearing shoes with LED lights in their soles to get the light and ground interaction."

For SPI's supervisor, Pete Travers, and DP Larry Fong, the power of having Crudup interacting with the characters and providing a light source on set instead of in post was awesome. "There are really nice surprises, like when Janey Slater [played by Laura Mennell] takes Manhattan's hand and a little blue shimmer crosses her lips. You'd never think of adding that—not when you're doing a thousand shots."

While Manhattan's face was essentially Crudup's geometry, his body was scanned from a photo model which was built to the proper scale and proportions. "We had tracking markers on his face and not a lot on his body, which gave us some automated movement," DesJardin reveals. "We had a version of Dr. Manhattan that was Billy's size, which was the target for all that on-set work. Then that would get re-targeted to the scaled Dr. Manhattan version, which is 6'2", which involved a combination of software and hand re-targeting."

So... does Dr. Manhattan look real? "I get asked that a lot," DesJardin admits. "Well, he looks as real as a six-foot, really yoked, glowing blue guy probably can right now." ■

Warner Bros.' *Watchmen* is currently playing in theaters across the U.S. and Europe. The film made \$55.2 million during its opening weekend in March.

Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry



Autodesk Maya 2009

This past year was a very busy period for Autodesk, which has added a few new jewels to its crown while keeping on top of its own current slate of products. One of the company's more recent releases is Maya 2009, and I am happy to report that among the plethora of seemingly minor changes in workflow, additions to modeling and selection tools and optimizing some of the code (all very important), a few of the more sexy features have been incorporated that make being a 3D artist even more fun than it was before.

The first large tag item on the list would be the implementation of Animation Layers—or

at least a better implementation of the idea which had been utilized in the Trax system.

Maya took a

cue from its sister software Motion Builder and utilized the technology that had been developed to create a system where an animator can non-destructively adjust animation by layering motions on top of one another. This is not a new paradigm in the animation world by any means, but Maya has a new interface for managing the layers effectively.

To go with our new animation tools is a Muscle System for rigging complex systems in characters to get more realism in your animation in a procedural way. Muscle systems can be added to rigs to provide bulging and contracting during character motion. Parameters can be weighed for precise control of where and how the actions occur. On top of the muscles themselves, a skin deformer is used to essentially wrap the muscles. Skin can slide over or stick to the muscles underneath, while new collision tools are included to prevent intersecting.

Finally, Maya has taken its nCloth technology and applied it to Particles, called—appropriately enough—nParticles! The nParticles are superior to the previous “dumb” particles in many ways: Collisions between particles and particle systems can happen. nParticles

can affect nCloth simulations and vice versa. And, nParticles can be assigned liquid attributes for calculating—wait for it—liquids. It's a nice addition to the Maya particle toolset. I am curious to find out where nParticles are going to be placed in the grand scheme of things in future releases.

Website: autodesk.com

Price: Maya 2009 Unlimited: \$4,995

Maya Unlimited Upgrade from 2008: \$1,795

Maya 2009 Complete: \$1,995

Maya Complete Upgrade from 2008: \$895

MotionBuilder 2009

MotionBuilder 2009 is a new version of an Autodesk 3D tool which focuses exclusively on animation and all things animated. It is often used to edit data in motion-capture pipelines for both film effects and video-games, but the extensive toolset is geared toward creating and managing complex character animation.

The newest features seem to focus mainly on physical dynamics calculation to enhance realism of the animator's work, thus simplifying the process by leaving the grunt work (read: mathematical calculations) to the CPUs and the creative work to the artists. So now, with rigid body dynamics, you can have objects fall on your character and not interpenetrate during collision. Artists can also animate in reaction to colliding objects.

But wait, the physics fun doesn't stop there: A “ragdoll” has been implemented so that realistic falls and collapses can be calculated utilizing the constraints in the rig to prevent the character's body from bending in improper ways while he's been affected by gravity or by falling rigid bodies

The remaining features—and there's a laundry list of them—have to do with pipeline development and tools to expand Mo-



tionBuilder's interoperability with its sibling 3D programs in the Autodesk world. Python support and editing tools have been bolstered. FBX file format support has been increased so that models, rigs and animation data can be moved from MB to Maya, Max or other 3D programs that are FBX friendly. And, the code has been opened up to 64-bit to take advantage of the faster procs.

Lastly, MotionBuilder now has the ubiquitous Steering Wheel and ViewCube—thereby completing its journey to manhood, i.e. becoming an Autodesk product!

Website: www.autodesk.com

Price: Software: \$3,995

Upgrade from 7.5: \$995

SoftimageXSI 7

Softimage's latest release of XSI is leaps and bounds beyond the previous one—which is saying a lot since XSI was already an extremely powerful piece of software. A huge list of advances have been implemented, including new toys inside the latest version of mental ray, refined render tree functionality and overall code optimization. But, the main event is truly the reveal of ICE (Interactive Creative Environment) which sounds like it does almost everything.

ICE, which used to be known by its more flowerchild name of Moondust during development, is a node-based method of creating particle systems—for the most part, anyway. ICE can read and write information from nearly every part of the Softimage environment leaving the possibilities up to the imagination of the user. However, most use it for creating very complex particle systems and retaining incredibly fast feedback.

The system takes the same paradigm as the XSI render tree, which closely resembles any node-based software, 3D or compositing. Information comes from somewhere, goes into the node, gets processed and then comes back out to be passed onto another node. More advanced systems such as Houdini and Thinking Particles use this approach frequently. This method is a good way to chart the calcu-

continued on page 64



Vancouver Film School alumni credits include **Across the Universe** Geeta Basantani, Digital Composer **Alias** Scott Dewis, Visual Effects Artist **Ant Bully** Ben Sanders, Character Animator | Rani Naamani, Animator | Ernesto Bottger, Character Animator **AVP: Alien Vs. Predator** Shawn Walsh, Color & Lighting Technical Director **Babel** Luis Blackaller, Storyboard Artist | Lon Molnar, Visual Effects Supervisor **Battlestar Galactica** Daniel Osaki, Lead Modeler | Megan Majewski, 3D Animator | Alec McClymont, 3D Artist **Blizzard Entertainment** Alvaro Buendia, Cinematic Artist **Bolt** Lino Di Salvo, Supervising Animator/Voice of Vinnie **Charlotte's Web** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer | Adam Yaniv, Character Animator | Tony Etienne, Lead Lighter | Kristin Sedore, Lighter **Chicago** Lon Molnar, Animation Supervisor **The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** Kristin Sedore, Lighter | Shawn Walsh, Lighter | Adam Yaniv, Character Animator **The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian** Andreas Hikel, Pre-Visualization Artist | Christoph Schinko, Character Animator | Jami Gigot, Senior Layout Artist **Cloverfield** Nicholas Markel, Pre-Visualization Supervisor **Constantine** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **The Dark Knight** Pietro Ponti, Lead CG Lighting Artist **Dead Like Me** Daniel Osaki, Visual Effects Artist | Alec McClymont, 3D Artist **Diablo III** Alvaro Buendia, Cinematic Artist | Steven Chen, Cinematic Artist **Family Guy** Michael Loya, Storyboard Artist **Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer** Arun Ram-Mohan, Lighting Technical Director | Shawn Walsh, Visual Effects Executive Producer | Jessica Alcorn, Composer **Flags of our Fathers** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **Gears of War (VG)** Scott Dossett, Animator **The Godfather (VG)** Kirk Chantraine, Motion Capture Specialist **The Golden Compass** Adam Yaniv, Animator | Chad Moffitt, Animator | Thom Roberts, Animator | Ben Sanders, Animator | Andrew Lawson, Animator | Matthias Lowry, Visual Effects | Tony Etienne, Look Development | Justin Hammond, Lighter Pearl Hsu, Effects Technical Director | Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer | Fion Mok, Matchmove Artist **Hairspray** Lon Molnar, Visual Effects Production Executive **Halo 3** Bartek Kujbida, Character Animator **Happy Feet** Ben Sanders, Character Animator Thom Roberts, Character Animator **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban** Shawn Walsh, Color & Lighting Technical Director **Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix** Pietro Ponti, Technical Director **Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince** Harry Mukhopadhyay, Lead Effects Technical Director **Hellboy** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **Hellboy II: The Golden Army** Christoph Ammann, 3D Sequence Supervisor **Horton Hears a Who** Arun Ram-Mohan, Lighting Technical Director | Brent Wong, Modeler **Hulk** Geoff Richardson, Visual Effects Editor **I, Robot** Daniel Osaki, CGI Modeler | Megan Majewski, Pre-Visualization **Ice Age: The Meltdown** Ben Sanders, Character Animator Arun Ram-Mohan, Lighting Technical Director **The Incredible Hulk** Shawn Walsh, Visual Effects Executive Producer | Tony Etienne, Look Development Lead **Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull** Henri Tan, Creature 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VFS student work by Jeff Plamondon

Supervisor | Cynthia Rodriguez del Castillo, Visual Effects Artist **World of Warcraft: Burning Crusade (VG)** Carman Cheung, Animator **A Wrinkle in Time** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **and many more.**



lation, but can also become a plate of spaghetti really fast, with wires going all over the place. Fortunately, XSI allows you to create compounds, which consolidate groups of nodes into one node (always accessible later), not only for organizational purposes, but also to hide the complexity from the end user who may only need a few parameters to change the behavior of the particle system.

I can't really express enough how potentially powerful ICE, and hence XSI, is in the hands of the right people—but it's not surprising that shortly after XSI was released, Autodesk swooped in and purchased the company, thereby expanding its powerful oligarchy. It will be interesting to see how nParticles and ICE will get along when placed in the same dog pen.

Website: www.softimage.com

Prices: SoftimageXSI Essentials Begins at \$2,995

SoftimageXSI Advance Begins at \$4,695

Adobe's Creative Suite 4 (CS4)

You can't really discuss any one component from Adobe without discussing the entire suite and how the programs work together. However, we can only fit so much info into such a small space, so I'll focus on the biggies, and then follow up with the "supplemental" programs—those without the fanfare of Photoshop, After Effects and Premiere. So let's look at the big three first:

Adobe is focused on interoperability in order to save time and increase workflow—sharing data between programs; moving between programs seamlessly. They've been doing this successfully since they put everything into the Creative Suites, and for CS4 they continue the trend.

Firstly, After Effects. Edited clips from Premiere Pro swap easily into AE, automatically creating a composite that reflects the original edit; a time saver unto itself. However, it doesn't end there: Once the clips are in AE, a dynamic link is created in Premiere so that any processing or compositing that is done in After Effects gets updated in the edit. So, no more pre-rendering and reimporting, sav-

ing time and reducing errors due to human interaction.

After Effects talks to Photoshop in the same fashion with dynamic links, sharing blending modes, layers and the properties of those layers. But in both PS and AE, new 3D functionality has been incorporated, using the powerful display cards' OpenGL to be able to paint on 3D objects in Photoshop, and then bring those objects into AE for compositing and additional animated processing.

Additional time-saving tools incorporated into AE include easier navigation, utilizing what they call Bread Crumbs to find your way back through complex, nested composites. This is a nice addition since things can get quite convoluted—especially without a functional node-based interface. (Yes, there is a node-based interface, but it's representational.) Furthermore, a quick search has been added to speedily find elements or effects by name.

Between AE and Premiere (also utilized in Soundbooth), a speech recognition engine generates transcriptions of dialogue from video clips. Words from the transcriptions can then be tagged and used editorially to mark places in the clip for easy recall. The transcription (which is saved as metadata in the file) can be used in AE and SB. The metadata will also follow the clip into FLV (Flash) files and act as search tags if you drag and drop or upload the clip to a website.

Speaking of Premiere and metadata, Adobe has modified its loglists into a more spreadsheet-like format for easy inputting of data, all of which is stored in the clips. This same method is used in OnLocation (a supporting CS4 program). On-set logging can be put into clips as they are captured. The data follows the clips into Premiere, and then is similarly accessed in After Effects and Soundbooth. By now, you can see how all of these pieces are starting to fit together.

Adobe expanded Premiere's interoperability with Final Cut Pro and Avid, obviously recognizing that one needs to abide by industry standards in order to become a standard in the industry. Premiere can import and export OMF files as well as traditional

EDLs. Not only that, it has presets for keyboard mapping so that FCP and Avid users can feel at home in the new environment.

Adobe has keyed into the fact that media needs to be created for many different platforms and many different sizes, especially with the massive amount of different kinds of mobile devices. Device Central works with Premiere and After Effects, and is packed with presets and the ability to set up multiple outputs at rendertime. Coupled with that, inside After Effects, safe frames can be shown for different mobile formats so you can choose the best composition and framing that will work with the most formats. You can even view the multiple formats as a contact sheet, seeing the comparison in viewport.

We mentioned the dynamic link between Premiere and After Effects, but the same connection can be made with Photoshop—Premiere recognizes the layers and parameters and they can be altered and manipulated. Speaking of which, Photoshop has new features specific to itself. In addition to the 3D features, Adobe has implemented a fancy-schmancy rescaling algorithm to preserve detail in different ways, including detecting skin-tonality as a reference. Some other re-

ally beneficial tools are photostitching using Photomerge technology and new windows for adjustment layer chock full of common preset functions.

Most of the CS4 modules have been recompiled for 64-bit operating systems to not only increase the processing power and speed, but also take advantage of large amounts of RAM.

I've been using Adobe products for decades and love them, so I'm a little biased. However, I do feel the Suite is a requirement for any reasonable production pipeline, and the tools should be required knowledge for any digital artist who wants to be worthwhile.

Website: www.adobe.com

Price: CS4 Design Premium: \$1,799 / upgrade for \$599. Production Premium: \$1,699 / \$599. Master Collection: \$2,499 / \$899. ■

Todd Sheridan Perry is the co-owner and vfx supervisor of Max Ink Productions. He can be reached at ducky@maxinkcafe.com.



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SICAF PROMOTION PLAN



Bringing the Force to Singapore

Lucasfilm training goes global.

by Ellen Wolff

When George Lucas launched Lucasfilm Animation in Singapore in 2005, he felt that working within Asia's anime culture would help foster the look he wanted for his *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* animated television series, which airs in the U.S. on Cartoon Network. To achieve this, the series spun from Lucas' *Star Wars* saga required an overseas talent ramp-up that the Jedi entrepreneur had not attempted before.

Steady streams of visiting veterans from Lucas' Northern California headquarters have helped incubate the Singapore start-up, but Lucas' long-term vision involves building a regional talent base that will collaborate remotely with his home base. According to Lucasfilm's Colum Slevin, who oversees the company's global talent development, the benefits will be mutual. "The beauty of our Singapore operation is

that we're building it from scratch. It's a huge training challenge for us but also a huge opportunity. We use Singapore as a 'Petri dish' for stuff that we ultimately want to use in Cali-

fornia. We can try things on a slightly smaller scale and with 'wetter paint' than we have back here."

One of those areas of experimentation has been cross-training—exchanging animators among interactive projects, TV animation and visual effects. In addition to animating *Clone Wars*, Singapore talent this year worked on mobile and hand-held games, and over 400 vfx shots for ILM. "There are subtle but profound differences in the way that animators work in these different areas," Slevin observes. "So immersing them in different day-to-day pipelines helped us break down barriers. We've had more opportunity to do that in Singapore than California."

Lucasfilm has been equally ambitious in training Singaporean talent, which now numbers 280 people. "We consolidated our talent development at the beginning of 2008 because we recognized that we had diverse training programs and internships," says Slevin. What he called "Plan A" of their strategy involved partnering with schools that would direct top graduates towards the studio—a typical approach in the U.S. "But we realized we were naïve to think that," admits Slevin. "Given that there wasn't a huge animation or effects industry in Singapore, it was naïve to think there would be an educational system to support that. So 'Plan B' was building it ourselves."

The result was The Jedi Masters program, aimed at training new talent from countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, India and Japan. "JMP is basically a six-month, paid apprentice program, and it's our main training pipeline now," Slevin explains. "Apprentices spend the first period of time in classrooms learning the basics. The middle section—



Colum Slevin

continued on page 68

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Mark Marcin, one of Lucasfilm's trainers, teaching modeling to a group of Jedi Masters Program trainees in Singapore.

and these periods are flexible depending on the discipline—covers aesthetic and artistic fundamentals. And the last period, which usually lasts 12 weeks, is a production mentorship where they're deployed on a project like a TV episode or a game level or a visual effects shot. They work in the midst of other art-

built an online system that helps bridge the many time zones separating the two locales. "It's great to fly people between Singapore and the U.S., but that's expensive and ultimately temporary," says Slevin. "If you don't have a good online solution then you're really kidding yourself. So we do remote training sessions

him pull down the menu and see what he does with it. That vidcap can be bookmarked and tagged so that you can watch the lesson online. It's a pretty elaborate system that our internal training group built over the last couple of years. Everyone at Lucasfilm is on the same network so they can pull up LOIS at their desktops."

The final piece of Lucasfilm's training approach is provided courtesy of Singapore itself, in the form of grant called STRAT (Strategic Attachment to Training). This program enables Singaporean interns to work at Lucasfilm in California, and Slevin reports, "We've availed ourselves of the program two years in a row. We had 10 interns in one discipline in 2006-2007, and in 2008 we've got 23 across 10 different disciplines. After spending time in the trenches here they'll go back to Singapore with Lucasfilm habits and values ingrained." Of course, adds Slevin, "It's been so valuable that the guys at ILM are telling me, 'We don't want to give our STRAT guys back!'" ■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects, animation and education.

"It's great to fly people between Singapore and the U.S., but that's expensive and ultimately temporary. If you don't have a good online solution then you're really kidding yourself. So we do remote training sessions where trainers in California essentially broadcast their lessons to Singapore."

—Colum Slevin, exec in charge of production operations at Lucasfilm

ists, and if they make it, we hire them."

The program reflects Lucasfilm's belief that the Singapore studio can't thrive based primarily on a staff of expatriots, however expert they may be. "That's just not a long-term sustainable scenario," asserts Slevin. "We definitely value ex-pats and we need them, but we want regional talent."

Ex-pat trainers from Lucas' California divisions regularly visit Singapore to act as mentors, but the company has also

where trainers in California essentially broadcast their lessons to Singapore. We have an extensive documentation and learning system called LOIS, which means Lucasfilm Online Information System. It's like a massive internal Wikipedia, though it's not technically similar."

He adds, "We've developed another internal tool that allows us to vidcap instructors alongside the output from their screen. If someone is teaching a Maya effects tutorial you can watch

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Takin' care of
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Note Gary's excellent
rolling technique



Botnik!
Director Jackie tracks
film festival showings
(the Galapagos IFF is a biggie)



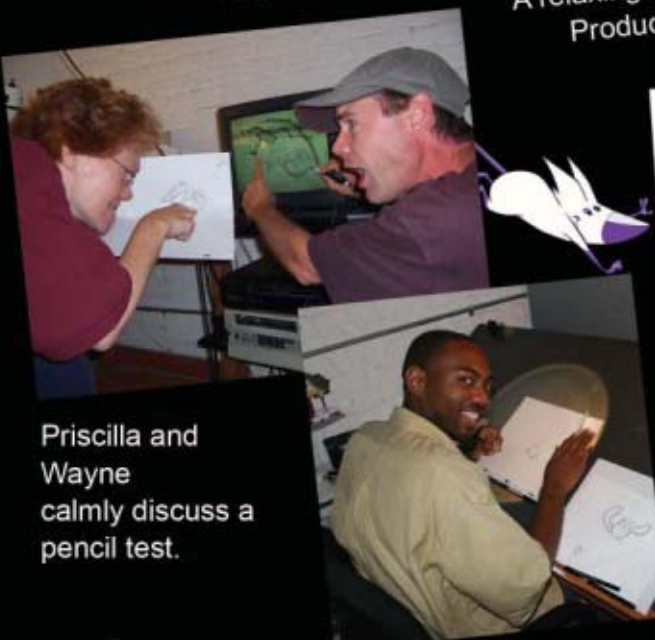
Ben and his magic
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A relaxing moment for Diane,
Production Manager.



Pat and Chuck
settle a creative dispute.



Priscilla and
Wayne
calmly discuss a
pencil test.

George caught in a wild mood
swing from cheerful to happy



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